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H U R R I S H

A STUDY

BY

THE HON. EMILY LAWLESS

AUTHOR OF 'A CHELSEA HOUSEHOLDER,'
'A MILLIONAIRE'S COUSIN'

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCLXXXVI

823

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1886 a

v. 1

TO

MRS OLIPHANT,

WITH A GREAT DEAL OF ADMIRATION

AND MORE AFFECTION,

THIS STORY IS DEDICATED BY

ITS AUTHOR.

Gen. Res. Ray 25 June 1955 Scribner 2 vol. 1886

Gen. Res. Ray 7/05/55

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HURRISH: A STUDY.



CHAPTER I.

AN IRON LAND.

WILDER regions there are few to be found, even in the wildest west of Ireland, than that portion of north Clare known to its inhabitants as "The Burren." Seen from the Atlantic, which washes its western base, it presents to the eye a succession of low hills, singularly grey in tone,—deepening often, towards evening, into violet or dull reddish plum colour—sometimes, after sunset, to a pale ghostly iridescence. They are quite low these hills—not above a thousand feet at

their highest point, and for the most part considerably less. Hills of this height, whatever their other merits, seldom attain to the distinction of being spoken of as "grand." Their character is essentially "mutton-suggesting." You picture them dotted over with flocks of sheep, which nibble the short sweet grass, and frisk in their idle youth over the little declivities. If here and there a rib or so of rock protrudes, they merely seem to be foils to the general smoothness. But these Burren hills are literally not clothed at all. They are startlingly, I may say scandalously, naked. From their base up to the battered turret of rock which serves as a summit, not a patch, not a streak, not an indication even, of green is often to be found in the whole extent. On others a thin sprinkling of grass struggles upward for a few hundred feet, and in valleys and hollows, where the washings of the rocks have accumulated, a grass grows, famous all over cattle-feeding Ireland for its powers of fattening. So, too, in the long vertical rifts or

fissures which everywhere cross and recross its surface, maiden-hair ferns and small tender-petalled flowers unfurl, out of reach of the cruel blasts. These do not, however, affect the general impression, which is that of nakedness personified—not comparative, but absolute. The rocks are not scattered over the surface, as in other stony tracts, but the whole surface is rock. They are not hills, in fact, but skeletons—rain-worn, time-worn, wind-worn,—starvation made visible, and embodied in a landscape.

And these strange little hills have had an equally strange history. They were the last home and the last standing-ground of a race whose very names have become a matter of more or less ingenious guess-work. Formorians? Firbolgs? Tuatha da Danaans? Who were they, and what were they? We know nothing, and apparently are not destined to know anything. They came—we know not whence, and they vanished—to all appearance into the Atlantic; pushed westward, like the Norwegian lemming, until, like that

most unaccountable of little animals, they, too, sprang into the waves and were lost. Little change has taken place in the aspect of the region since those unknown races passed away. Their great stone-duns are even still in many places the largest buildings to be seen,—the little oratories and churches which succeeded them having become in their turn, with hardly an exception, ruins like themselves, their very sites forgotten, melted into the surrounding stoniness. The Burren is not—in all probability never will be—a tourist-haunt, but for the few who know it, it has a place apart, a distinct personality—strange, remote, indescribable. Everything that the eye rests on tells us that we are on one of the last standpoints of an old world, worn-out with its own profusion, and reduced here to the barest elements. Mother Earth, once young, buxom, frolicsome, is here a wrinkled woman, sitting alone in the evening of her days, and looking with melancholy eyes at the sunset.

The valley of Gortnacoppin is a sort of

embodiment of the Burren. Standing in it you might fairly believe yourself in the heart of some alpine region, high above the haunts of men, where only the eagle or the marmot make their homes. All the suggestions are alpine, some of them almost arctic. The white stream cutting its way through the heaped-up drift; the water churning and frothing hither and thither in its impatience, and leaving a white deposit upon all the reeds and stones; the pallid greyish-green vegetation, with here and there a bit of dazzling red or orange; the chips and flakes of rock which lie strewn about; the larger stones and boulders toppled down from the cliff above, and lying heaped one over the other in the bed of the stream,—many of the latter, you may perceive, have not long fallen, for their edges are still unweathered. Here and there over the top and sides of the drift a little thin grass has spread itself, through which trenches have been torn, showing the earth and stones below. Truly a grim scene!—suggestive of nothing so much as one of those ugly little

early German prints, where every stick and stone seems to be grimacing with unpleasant intention. Only look hard enough at any of the rocks, and you will assuredly see a gnome appear !

Towards the bottom, where it approaches the sea, this valley, however, expands, and becomes an irregular lake-like circle, mapped out into small fields, separated from one another by tottering lace-work walls. After following the downward course of the upper valley, you would have been surprised at the sudden fertility of this little space, the greenness of the grass, the promising look of the small crops of bottle-green potatoes. If something of a geologist, however, you would have suspected that the mass of detritus, borne down from the hills, and spread abroad here at their feet, had something to say to that satisfactory result.

Between five and six years ago the greater part of this little fertile oasis was rented by Horatio, or, as he was less classically called by his neighbours, Hurrish O'Brien, one of

the countless O'Briens of Clare. His cabin—a rather large one, built of stone and thatched—stood upon the summit of a little ridge, conspicuous, like a small fly upon a large window-pane, in the absence of any other building; rendered still more so by a good-sized ash-tree, which stood upon the ridge beside it—a noticeable distinction in so leafless a district.

It was a warm morning late in May, and even the stony Burren had begun to feel a touch of spring, its ferns and little delicate-petalled blossoms to reach out inquiring heads over their stony prisons. Hurrish had just returned to breakfast. He had been down early to the sea, to set some fishing-lines—for, like most of the inhabitants of that amphibious part of the island, he was part farmer and part fisherman,—perhaps it would be more accurate in his case to say three-parts farmer to one-part fisherman, the latter vocation being, in fact, rather a matter of “intertainment” than profit.

The door of the cabin was open, and the

window unshuttered (the latter for an excellent reason, there were no shutters), yet the cabin itself was lit by its fire. The light, spreading from the blazing turf, broke in red flakes upon the bare rafters of the roof, upon the roughly plastered walls, upon a quantity of highly coloured pious prints upon the walls, upon others of a less pious character pinned beside them, upon a rough white terrier, two solemn black pigs, and three children scattered over the mud floor, upon an *omnium gatherum* of tags and rags, stray fragments of furniture, tools, clothing, straw, bedding, sacks, heaps of potatoes,—an indescribable and incalculable collection of long accumulated rubbish, huddled, in more or less picturesque confusion, one on top of another—the sort of picturesqueness which fastidious people prefer in its painted rather than in its actual form !

Hurrish sat upon a low “creepy” stool, with a huge mug of stirabout (known to the ignorant as porridge) upon his knees, which he was shovelling down his throat by the aid

of a large iron spoon. A broad-shouldered, loose-limbed, genial-faced giant was Hurrish, such as these western Irish counties occasionally breed. Irish in every feature, look, and gesture, there was yet a smack of something foreign about him, to be accounted for possibly by that oft-quoted admixture of Spanish blood, the result of bygone centuries of more or less continuous intercourse. His hair was black as a cormorant's wing, and curly under the old felt hat, half of whose brim had vanished in some distant engagement; his beard was curly too, and black, yet his eyes were grey, his skin evidently originally fair, and his expression open, good-humoured, irresolute, with a spice of native fun and jollity about it. Despite the jollity which was its prevailing expression, he did not seem to be altogether a contented giant. There were lines of perplexity and disturbance here and there discernible. Yet Hurrish O'Brien was a well-to-do man. He had a good stock of cows and calves; he held his farm on a moderate rental; his wife had brought him

fifty gold sovereigns tied up in a pocket-handkerchief; his children were strong and healthy; and he was regarded by his neighbours generally as one of the "warmest" men between Blackhead and the mouth of the Shannon.

Opposite, upon another low creepy-stool, sat his mother, Bridget O'Brien, engaged in stirring a steaming black pot—an employment which would have given a sensitive looker-on a delightful thrill, so appropriate was the operation to the operator. In Bridget O'Brien the Southern type was also strongly visible. Women like her—as gaunt, as wrinkled, as black-browed, as witch-like—may be seen seated upon thousands of door-steps all over the Spanish peninsula. It is not a very comfortable type, one would think, for everyday domestic use; too suggestive of an elderly bird of prey—a vulture, old, yet with claws ever upon the watch to tear, and a beak which yearns to plunge itself into the still palpitating flesh. Her eyes were black—a wicked black—and bright still

amid the multiplicity of wrinkles which surrounded them, as cracks a half-dried pool. Her hair, too, was dark, and hung in heavy hanks about her forehead, reaching nearly to the grizzled eyebrows, projecting like unclipped eaves over her eyes.

Bridget O'Brien was an ardent patriot! The latest tide of revolutionary sentiment had begun to spread its waves even to the heart of remotest Burren, and she was the chief recipient of it in the O'Brien household. It was she who knew when, where, how, and why the latest agrarian outrage had been committed, and was the first to raise the war-cry of triumph and exultation upon these joyful occasions. Not that the rest of the family were backward in their degree. Hurish had called himself a Fenian almost ever since he could remember, and nothing but his distance from the seat of war had prevented him from striking a blow when that ill-starred apology for a rebellion came to its final and melancholy close. Animosity against England was a creed with him, a sort

of shibboleth—something like the middle-class English hatred of France some three-quarters of a century ago. His belief in its wickedness and atrocities was a belief that knew absolutely no misgivings. Had he been assured that, like Herod of old, an order had just been issued by its Government for all infants under two years of age to be slaughtered, I doubt if it would have struck him as at all incredible, or even out of character with what he supposed to be the normal nature of its proceedings.

Hurrish's patriotic potations, however, were mild and diluted compared with those quaffed to the very dregs by his mother. He was not a man easily roused to bitterness, and would hardly, I think, have cared to kill even an Englishman, unless some very good purpose could have been served by so doing. When Bridget brought back tales of vengeance, executed upon the latest enemies of their country, he listened, but rarely found himself warmed to the point of emulation; the details of those gallant achievements

being apt, in fact, to have rather a chilling and discouraging effect upon his imagination. What he enjoyed was what may be called the frivolous side of patriotism,—the mere noise, the crowd, the excitement, the waving flags, the new tin-pikes, the thrilling, delightful, inexhaustible oratory of his chosen leaders. All this was meat, drink, and clothing to him, and he would have walked thirty miles any day of his life to enjoy it. On the other hand, the detailed projects of vengeance were apt to pass over his head. He admitted their necessity, but blinked the details. When Ned Clancy, for instance, with his wife and four small children, were turned out of their cabin in the dead of a January night, because Clancy had taken Lynch's farm, contrary to well known if unwritten local laws, Hurrish had been disposed to feel sorry for the more juvenile of the criminals. Not so his mother. "What ailed he to be pityin' of thim? wasn't it known they wouldn't have been sarved so if they hadn't been desarvin'?" that thoroughgoing

woman asked fiercely. Hideous prints, of still more hideous significance, disfigured a considerable portion of the cabin walls. There was one cheerful design in particular, representing the roasting alive of men in swallow-tail coats, tall hats, and white neck-cloths, presumably landlords and their myrmidons. The intention was allegorical probably, but to Bridget it was literal enough, and it was upon such pabulum she feasted her eyes with all the relish of a petticoated vampire.

Poor little Alley Sheehan, Hurrish's niece by marriage, could not so much as bear to look at the side of the wall where these prints hung, and averted her eyes whenever she happened to approach them. They made her feel cold and sick. She was too much afraid of old Bridget, however, to show this repugnance openly, for Bridget was a domestic despot, and not by any means one of the benevolent variety. There was no blood tie between them, either, to soften the yoke. When Alley's mother died, Hurrish and his wife had taken her to live with them out of

sheer charity and kindness of heart. When poor Mary O'Brien in her turn died, old Bridget would willingly have turned Alley out upon the cold high-road to beg. There were points, however, where Hurrish, yielding as he was, could hold his own, and this was one of them. He had a very tender spot in his heart for little Alley, whose great grey eyes it was hard to meet without softening. They were wonderful eyes, such as are only to be seen in their perfection west of the Shannon,—violet grey, with lashes which fell in a straight black drift upon the cheek below,—eyes with a rippling light and shade in the irises, such as streams show when flowing clear over a pebbly bottom. The face, too, which went with them, suited the eyes, which is by no means invariably the case, more especially in Ireland.

For all her eyes, Alley counted for very little in the estimation of her contemporaries. The average young Irish male is not perhaps a particularly discriminating animal, and the finer points are apt to be undiscernible by

him. Hers was the sort of beauty which needs indeed some eye-culture to appreciate, a beauty which clings with peculiar tenacity to the inward vision after the outward presentment has faded, which no rags, no dirt, no circumstances, however repellent, avail to spoil—nay, which seem to bloom the brighter for such accessories, as the peculiar blue of a speedwell shines best on that discarded heap of refuse where we grudge yet delight to see it. There was a touch of ascetic dreaminess about her which suited her stony environment, and remotely suggested the cloister—a sort of nun-like fragility and separateness. Yet Alley was not really delicate. She could carry her creel of turf or her can of butter-milk as long and as lightly as any girl in the Burren. Her small shapely brown feet could tramp unwearily a long summer's day over the stones. Those beautiful pathetic eyes of hers had never known the shelter of a hat or a bonnet in all their days. Strange flower of humanity, a very young girl's beauty ! Springing, we hardly know whence ;

dropped often where it seems least to tell; with something pathetic about it always, and most of all where so few years seem bound, as in a case like this, to bring it to an end.

The party in the cabin had been silent while the work of breakfast went steadily on. A ray of sunshine—the pallid ineffectual sunshine of the far, far west—was making its way across the floor, and disputing the ground with the paling light from the turf. Through the open doorway they could see the little hollow below, looking like a green saucer upon a grey floor. The drills of potatoes were appearing in dark-green jagged rows between the boulders, and over the grey shoulder of the next ridge the long heave of the Atlantic could be heard rising and falling in a slow harmonious cadence.

Alley, with an iron spoon in her hand, was feeding the youngest child, a rosy creature of three, who sat plump upon the ground, its fat bare feet and legs out-

stretched, and its round red mouth agape, like a young hedge-sparrow, for the mouthful of stirabout. The other two children had finished their breakfast, and were rolling about the floor trying to induce Lep,—short for Leprehaun,—Hurrish's yellow and white terrier, to join them—who, however, sat stiff and erect, his eyes intently fixed upon his master, his ugly, honest, mongrel face irradiated with patient adoration. It is rather rare to see any strong symptoms of mutual regard between an Irish peasant and his dog—such as, for instance, links the Scotch shepherd to his collie. The dogs have to take their chance with the pigs, children, and poultry. They have not the financial value, and therefore dignity, of the first-named, nor the natural claims of the second, neither, again, has kindly nature endowed them with the same convenient capacity for escaping sticks, heels, and other weapons of offence that it has bestowed upon the last. They receive food when there is plenty going; when times are short they are

kicked out to seek or steal their dinners as they can. Hurrish, however, was an exception, and his ragged Lep loved him with as deep and adoring a love as ever tender-hearted cur lavished upon indifferent man.

The stillness outside was wonderful, such stillness as could only exist in so depopulated a region—a region where there were no fields to plough, few seeds to be sown, no carriages to drive, and hardly any roads to drive them on ; nothing but sea, sky, rocks, cloud,—a stillness that was like death, broken only by the larks, which wheeled and circled overhead, pouring out their heavenly notes over those grey unfriendly rocks in a melodious and interminable cataract.

All at once this death-like silence was violently broken. A shrill cry—the cry of a woman—rang out across the stony stillness, and with one accord every one, even the dog and the children, sprang up and ran to the door. Up the stony slope, at a pace only possible to one accustomed from child-

hood to that rugged fragment of earth's surface, came a girl. After her in full pursuit followed a man—unwieldy, red-faced, heavy-jawed, brutal—a sort of human orang-outang or Caliban, whose lumbering action and coarse gesture had something grotesque and even repulsive about them, as it were a parody or perversion of humanity.

Hurrish ran hastily down the slope and met the girl, who clutched frantically at his arm, turning round as she did so to look back at her pursuer, who on his side stopped short upon the platform of rock which he had reached, and remained there bellowing forth indistinct curses and half inarticulate threats of vengeance. Then, like some baffled beast of prey, he turned, and strode sulkily back over the narrow rifts of rocks, his brutish figure—reflected in all its uncouthness upon the wet surfaces as upon a sheet of dulled ice—disappearing a minute later over the next perpendicular descent.

The other two returned to the cabin, where the rest of the party had remained in an

excited group around the door. Entering, the girl—a handsome florid creature of twenty or thereabouts—flung herself down with an air of exhaustion upon a stool. It was evident, however, in spite of her first words, that she was not quite so much frightened as she pretended to be.

“’Tis scared I am half to death!” she declared, pantingly. “Alley, darlint, you’re whiter nor the driven snow! Bad luck to that baste for scarin’ yis. ’Twas drunk he was—mad drunk an’ quarrelsome. I was coming round the corner of Gortnacoppin, thinkin’ of nothink t’all, when all at onst he lep at me from behind of th’ ould chapel place, an’ swore roight or wrong to kiss me—the on-dacent bliggard! I lit out one screech an’ run, and he afther me over the racks. Trath, I thought onst I was cotched, but he was too drunk to go stiddy, thanks be to God, and I heard him stumblin’ about like a sale behint ov me. ’Tis a moighty quare way to be coortin’ a gurl—scarin’ her out ov her rai-son!” she added, meditatively. “I’ll thank

ye kindly, Mrs O'Brien, for a sup ov cow's milk. 'Tis parched I am wid the drought."

Sal Connor was the beauty of Tubbamina, and its heiress too. Her father was not long dead, and she, singular to relate, had been his only child. To her belonged the cabin in which she and her mother then lived. Hers were the two fine cows tethered beside it; hers the goats and sheep which fed on the short sweet grass sprouting between the rocks. Needless to say she had had her choice of suitors, the unattractive Caliban who had just been pursuing her being one of them, and the most persevering of the band. By a piece of contrariety, Sal Connor, however, had fixed her heart upon Hurrish O'Brien, who upon his side cared not at all for her. Though a widower, and therefore at a disadvantage, he was the biggest, the strongest, the best-looking, and the best-tempered man in the whole neighbourhood of Tubbamina, and ever since poor Mary O'Brien's death, nearly three years before, Sal had made up her mind to fill that vacant place

—a resolve which she by no means confined to her own maidenly bosom. She was a good-hearted girl, and if she married Hurish, had every intention of making him the best of wives—as wifhood is understood in the west of Ireland. She would certainly not have felt it incumbent upon her to mend his clothes, or keep his cabin in order; neither would she have desired that the children should learn the use of soap, or go to school, with the exception, that is, of the elder girls, for whom she would have scraped together money enough to send to a convent, where they might learn to play the piano-forte, make lead-pencil drawings of surpassing shininess, perhaps even acquire the French language, as spoken at Buttevant or Ahascragh,—generally, in short, pick up such accomplishments as were likely to be of most service to them in the sphere of life they were destined to occupy.

Meantime that more advanced stage of the seven ages of womanhood had not yet arrived, and Sal Connor was in the earlier, provocative,

coquettish stage of the young hen-pheasant or curassow, who is courted by half a dozen aspiring males, only that whereas those ignorant birds go arrayed for the most part in sober greys and browns, leaving the more gorgeous hues for their admirers, Sall delighted all Tubamina and Gortnacoppin, too, by the splendours of her shawls and petticoats—on Sunday outshining even the painted images in the chapel. Old Bridget favoured Sall, and would willingly have seen her married to Hurrish. The money was the main consideration, of course ; but besides this, her own influence with him, she was aware, had been rather waning of late, and a daughter-in-law, whom she could easily, she flattered herself, win over to her way of thinking, would be a prime auxiliary in stirring up that sluggish spirit to greater activity.

“An’ what ailed that baste to run after ye to-day, ’cushla?” she inquired curiously. “Was it anythink new, or just th’ ould divilmint?”

“Och, I dunno ; ’tis jealous, I think, he is.

He can't 'bide for me comin' this way 'tall, whatever the rason is!" with a coy glance under her eyelashes at Hurrish, who was mixing a pot of tar with a bit of stick, and, therefore, unfortunately unconscious of the tender provocation.

"Bad ind to his sowl,—he's the curse ov the counthry!" the old woman growled savagely. "An' if he doesn't be mendin' his manners, he'll be makin' it too hot for him, too, so he will—the bletherin' baste!"

"He's rich, they say," Sal said, in a tone of extenuation. It is never well to run down an admirer overmuch, even if you have no immediate intention of accepting him.

"Rich! Och, bedad, if riches was all, 'tis rich he is an' to spare! Why, the whisky alone he drinks wud float a ship, so 't wud—a ship of war! Ould Mrs Connor—that's Darby Connor's widy—telled me she seen a man comin' up the car-thrack beyant his house wid an ass, an' a barrel on the top ov it wuldn't barely cum in at the door. An' he outs hisself and helps to rowl it in;

an' never a dhrop to n'er a one, but sittin', an' swillin', an' a-making a baste ov hisself, all to hisself—iless maybe that bruther of his does be helpin' him"—with a glance out of her black eyes to where Alley was sitting a little apart, with the youngest child on her lap.

This roused Hurrish.

"Morry never dhrinks a drop, mother—ye know that as well as meself," he said, quietly.

"Trath, I know nothing 'bout it," she answered, angrily.

"Thin I do, an' I tell ye 'tis so. The two is no more 'like nor a garden flower an' my old blackthorn there. 'Tis the hoight ov wonders to ivery sowl in the warld how they comes to be bruthers 'tall."

"Och, yer allays moighty sot upon yer Morry! Wait till the bruther does be a cuttin' of yer throat, an' him helpin' him for to do it! Maybe ye won't think so moighty much ov him *thin!*"

To this rhetorical thrust Hurrish made no

reply, and a silence ensued of several minutes' duration.

"So the poor Maloneys is out 't last!" Sal Connor observed, by way perhaps of giving a new and more agreeable turn to the conversation. "Poor Mrs Maloney! dacent woman! 'Tis a power of trouble she's had first and last. An' who'll be takin' the farm? 'Twud be a hundred ov pities for that gran' ground to go waste. 'Tis the iligantest grazin', they say, in the Burren. 'Twud be moighty convanient for yourself, Mr O'Brien, wudn't it, now?" she added, turning to Hurrish. "So handy to your own; an' you an' the Meejor so frindly, more be token?"

This brought Bridget out once more on to the war-path.

"Divil a one will take that farm, not if it was the last bit ov grazin' in all Oirland, an' ivery baste in the warld dyin' for the want ov a bite!" she announced, bringing her closed fist down upon the dresser with a thump that made the crockery jingle.

“Whoiver goes in at Mick Maloney’s door comes out ov’t on his back, and roightly sarved too, an’ I’d say the same if it was twinty sons ov me own was attimptin’ to do such a thing!”

She looked round the cabin as if to challenge contradiction, but no one responded. Hurrish continued to mix his pot as if nothing in the least affecting him had been said. Like many mild men blessed with a turbulent womankind, he had long learned to regard these outbursts as part of the everyday order of things, like the roaring of the wind or the crumbling of the turf, and to pay as little attention. He had no more idea of taking the farm from which the Maloneys had just been evicted than he had of taking Dublin Castle, and this his mother knew quite as well as he did himself. If she liked, therefore, to utter blood-curdling predictions as to what she could, would, or might do in the inconceivable event of his doing anything of the sort, why, he was not the man to grudge her so innocent an amusement.

“Well, I must be goin’,” Sal Connor said at last, rising and complacently shaking out her skirts as she spoke. Although she had only come, as had been seen, for a mere morning call, her petticoat was a new purple rep, edged with broad magenta braid, and trimmed with three rows of canary-coloured lace, over which she wore a new green calico bodice.

“’Tis ’feared I am to be going back ’lone,” she added coquettishly. “Maybe that baste is waitin’ for me still, an’ the drink not out ov him yit! Alley, darlint, you’ll cum wid me, won’t you? Ach *doee*, lovey,” with a glance at some one who was not by any means Alley.

Poor Alley turned quite pale.

“Usha, don’t ask me, Sall, I durstn’t,” she said, clasping her hands appealingly. “He run out at me once, an’ I thought I’d die—I did indade!”

“Gorra, did he want to be a-kissin’ ov *you* too?” the other inquired, not without a touch of disdain.

Alley turned a delicate rose-colour.

"I dunno what he wanted, but he frightened me sore. He's a wicked, bad man. He'd dishtroy th' whole ov us out an' out, av he had the chance, just for spite ov Hurrish. 'Tis a fearful thing to have him 'bout the country. I'd leaver meet a mad dog nor a bull any day."

"Trath an' he won't be 'bout it *long*, I tell yis all that!" Bridget said emphatically. "There's buoys that, for the wink ov an eyelid, wud put him out of that,—yis, an' glad, an' proud to do it too; if there is *sum* so mane-spirited they'd take tratement wud insinse a babby—an' unwaned babby—an' only say 'Thank ye!'" with a glance of fiery disdain at her son.

Hurrish laughed.

"'Tis an iligant Christsheen yer makin' me out, mother, anyhow!" he said good-humouredly.

"Christsheen!" Bridget threw all the power of her scorn into the second syllable. "Christsheen, indade! Give me a little

spurit! To be growed a man—shtrong, an' tall, an' shtraight—the biggest man out an' out in the counthry—able to dishtroy th' whole of thim iv he'd a moind, an' niver to lift a hand,—no, nor th' half ov a hand! Shtrike me dead this minite iv I wudn't rayther have a son like Sheeny O'Callaghan, wid niver a leg to put undher him 'tall—so I wud! Shtrike me dead ilse!”

CHAPTER II.

HURRISH SUSPECTS THE UNSEEN POWERS.

IN the end old Bridget herself escorted Sall Connor back to her cottage, which was upon the outskirts of Tubbamina, the village just over the ridge of the hill, Hurrish excusing himself on the score of having to see to his boat, which he had left on the sands, and which would certainly be washed away if he delayed much longer. His fishing, as already hinted, was rather an excuse. Now and then, when he got a good haul, he would make a little money by sending a donkey-load to Lisdoonvarna, the water-cure place six or eight miles away, but for the most part it was more pleasure than profit. He had a hankering for the sea, and was not

sorry to find an excuse for escaping his mother's tongue and the humdrum monotony of the farm, and for both these purposes the boat was a good excuse.

He did not start, however, for some minutes after his mother and Sal Connor had gone down the slow incline, and were lost to sight over the next grey ridge. Though he had taken the former's threats lightly, they had rather startled him. He had heard them frequently before, it is true, but never expressed quite so definitely. Mat Brady was his enemy, declared and deadly ; still, enemy as he was, and brutal, dangerous bully and savage as he was, Hurrish had no particular desire to have him murdered, still less to have his own mother mixed up in that informal transaction.

Murder as a recognised social institution had never somehow quite commended itself either to his intelligence or his humanity ! Though he had openly and enthusiastically joined himself to every association which had even nominally the emancipation of Ireland

for its aim, he had never allied or desired to ally himself to any of those less avowed societies with which Clare, like every other part of Ireland, is honeycombed, and which subsist upon murder, and upon murder only. He had been elected to one of them, it is true, in his absence, and had weakly refrained from insisting upon his name being struck off again. Through his mother, too, he was better acquainted with the underground doings of the neighbourhood than he by any means ought to have been, but it was reluctantly, and he struggled stoutly to shake himself free from the participation, and to defend, whenever it was possible, the victims of it.

But if he disapproved, why not have given notice to the police, and have had the perpetrators brought to justice? the innocent reader will perhaps inquire. The reader who asks that question must indeed be very innocent, or very slightly acquainted with those unseen springs which make up by far the more important of our

inner machinery. The position of the informer in Ireland, to begin with, is the position of an outcast, cursed and abhorred of all men, to be disposed of, so soon as safe opportunity presents itself. It was not fear, however, so much as other hindrances that hampered Hurrish. Claims of all sorts—of honour, of good fellowship, of pity—plucked at him, now on this side and now on that, as the demons in Holbein's print plucked at Sintram as he rode through the dark valley. Hurrish was no Sintram, yet there was something tragic, as well as decidedly ridiculous, in the acuteness of his dilemma. His very good-nature and sociability were all against him. For what, it may be asked, is a good-natured and a naturally gregarious man to do, when all the sociability of his neighbourhood is concentrated around a single focus, and that focus a criminal one?

His own impulses were all of the old-fashioned, easy-going, jovial kind. He hated fighting—except, of course, the open and fist-cuff variety; he hated dark deeds and dark

secrets, and everything that savoured of unpleasantness and treachery. He would have liked from year's end to year's end to go on in the same genial friendly fashion, the same happy-go-lucky indifference to the future. Pity such natures when their lot has been cast into the bitter yeast of a social revolution! They are the clay pots amongst the iron ones, and the fate of the clay pot is theirs.

He got up after a while, pushed away a chicken which had perched itself meditatively upon his foot, whistled to Lep, and started towards the sea, leaving Alley Sheehan to look after the house and mind the children.

His way led across about half a mile of gradually descending ground, over a succession of slabs of rock, many of them as much as a dozen or more feet in diameter. In all directions these slabs were divided and subdivided by an endless multiplicity of narrow fissures or crevasses, varying from a few inches to a foot across, but reaching down apparently to immeasurable depths. There

was something about it that might have reminded a climber of a moderately level glacier—the Mer-de-Glace above Chamounix, for instance,—and like a glacier, the edges or lips of these fissures were worn, channelled, and smoothed away, presenting a curiously molten effect, the result in this case of the action of rain and running water upon the soluble particles of limestone. Instead of naked ice, these crevasses, however, were crammed to the very brim with a green tide of vegetation—ferns and mosses, hairbells, saxifrages, silver silenes, and white mountain dryas, red-petalled daisies, lifting sweet impertinent faces out of their hollow prisons, trailing sprays of clematis and honeysuckle flinging their scent-laden treasures broadcast across the scentless rocks—as if earth, defrauded of her natural growths, had crowded all possible accumulations into these receptacles which had been torn so capriciously out of her sides for their reception.

Hurrish strode on, stepping over the narrow fissures, whose edges gave out a respon-

sive click to the contact of his boots—small fragments of stone, detached from the edges, falling with a metallic ring into the nearest cleft. He was in a hurry, for he had really left his boat too close to the edge of the water, having expected to return much sooner. At last he reached the top of the cliff, and could see down into the little horseshoe-shaped bay which served him for a boat-house. All right, the boat was there ! and he was able, therefore, to pause for a moment to look around him before beginning the descent.

Picturesqueness *as* picturesqueness counted probably little enough with Hurrish, yet in another way he was more sensitive to outward impressions than many a cultured gentleman with a brain well stocked with quotations. The roar of the sea, the wet-surfaced rocks, the streaks of sunshine dashed with rain, the wild west wind which had travelled over so many miles of liquid ridge and furrow,—all this was a sort of natural fuel to his imagination, stirring it

unconsciously to sudden feats of activity. His was the genuine Celtic temperament—poetic, excitable, emotionable, unreasoning. Of the more brutal and cruel elements, which too often, alas! streak and disfigure that strain, he had hardly a trace. He was kindly to softness, and tender-hearted almost to womanliness. Those schemes of personal vengeance—dark, bloody, tiger-like—which, century after century, have nourished the sense of injury, while they soothed the immediate lot of many a half-starved Celt, were almost as foreign to him as that ox-like indifference which enables men of other races to submit to the dreariest of daily drudgeries, without a thought or a dream of escape. Hurrish had a vein of poetic excitability which craved nourishment. Temperaments which, under happier circumstances, might very well have been the homes of a genuine fount of poetry, will often, for lack of better aliment, feed upon the veriest garbage, and accept the most worthless of sawdust-cakes for bread. The

magnificent promises, the fiery denunciations, the windy turbid patriotism of his favourite newspapers — by preference the contraband ones—were such sawdust-cakes to him ; he could stand and hear them read aloud by the hour, without even requiring the additional stimulus of whisky. He was not quite without other imaginative provision, however. Like many a letterless Irish peasant, his mind was stored with an endless stock of old songs and ballads, the sonorous lilt of which has charms even for those least in sympathy with them. To-day, for instance, as he turned from the cliff-edge and hurried down the narrow break-neck path, Lep at his heels, the rapid movement, the wind, the sudden vivifying touch of spring—all excited him without his knowing how or why, and he broke into a strain, half-singing, half-shouting,—

“ Think av ould Brian,
War’s moighty lion,
’Neath that banner ’twas that he shmote the Dane !
The Northman an’ Saxon,
Aft turned their backs on
Those who——”

The strain stopped abruptly ! A huge piece of rock came thundering down the side of the cliff, only missing the singer by about half a foot, plunging over the brim of the next ridge, and falling with a tremendous splash, splash, splash into the sea below ! A second followed, and then a third. Then a train of smaller ones, each as big as a child's head.

Lep gave a wild bound of dismay, and fled down the path, his tail tucked tight between his legs. Hurrish sprang nimbly aside ; then, when the falling avalanche had ceased, he turned, and, keeping as close as he could to the edge of the cliff-wall, clambered hastily up the track, his teeth set, and his soul on fire for vengeance. Woe betide the man, whoever he was, who had set those stones rolling ! Like many a mild man, Hurrish, with the hero of his song, could be a lion when he was roused, and his blood was thoroughly up now.

When he got to the top not a soul, however, was to be seen ! not a trace or a symptom of any human being. The bare cliff edge stood

bathed in light ; the little wind-beaten camomile flowers turned up innocent dog-eared faces to him ; the wild stony country on the one side, the untravelled wastes of sea on the other, seemed equally void of humanity. He scratched his head, and looked round and round, furious, yet without an object to vent his wrath upon. A trying predicament truly for an infuriated giant !

Where the rocks came from was at any rate easily seen. Along a considerable distance of one part of the top of the cliff ran a sort of natural rampart, known to geologists as a "block beach,"—proof of the stupendous power of the waves which had deposited them there during a long succession of howling winters. Many of these blocks were of enormous size, larger even than those which had so nearly annihilated Hurrish, and beyond this natural barrier, a little way from the edge, stood a small rath or dun, two-thirds of which had been demolished.

Finding no clue to the phenomenon, he at

last slowly retraced his steps, looking back from time to time in hopes of espying an antagonist, his soul hot within him and longing for revenge. At the very bottom of his anger there was, however, an underlying touch of mystery,—a suspicion of something not altogether natural. The old demon-worship dies hard in remote regions like the stony-hearted Burren; it forms so large and so strong an element in the traditional inheritance of the Celt, that it seems almost impossible that it can ever be entirely extirpated. Hurrish was not more superstitious than his neighbours, yet he by no means felt sure that what had just befallen him had not been the work of some malevolent spirit or spirits. What more likely than that an unseen something had toppled those rocks down the cliff for the amusement of seeing a man hop like a hailstone in a shower, or, if he was in a specially malignant mood, to crush him flat under them like a beetle under a warming-pan? It was not such an uncommon occurrence! At Ailleenahasragh, only a few miles down

the coast, there was a hole in a rock that was known to be permanently occupied by an evil spirit. Fishermen had heard him picking loose pieces off the rock at night, and throwing them into the sea. Nay, an old woman, who was passing the place late one evening on her way home from a fair, had actually *seen* something sitting upon the top, with its legs crossed, a pipe in its mouth, and a hump on its back. She would have taken it, she admitted, for a pedlar wearing a pack, but that, fortunately, just as she was getting near she saw that there was a large hole—big enough, she declared, to put a couple of chickens through—in the middle of its back. Now no respectable pedlar, it will be admitted, has ever a hole of that kind through the middle of *his* back ! It was one of the disadvantages of that part of Clare, that it was rather a favourite haunt of beings of this kind. There was a lake only three miles away which was haunted by the *Each-Usge*, or water-horse, a supernatural animal of particularly unpleasant manners. A full ac-

count of its appearance and behaviour was written down from the report of an eye-witness, and is still preserved for reference. It is described as having “a black shining skin,” a “switch tail without hair,” and “a mule’s head, with fins like a haddock.” Its habit is to wait till some one passes close to its lair, then to spout out an enormous quantity of water from its mouth, and before he has recovered the shock, it darts upon him, and draws him into the lake, where it rarely happens that even his bones are recovered again. Hurrish’s own father had had an adventure with a monster almost more terrible. He was fishing off the island of Ard-oilen, which has always borne a bad reputation ever since it gave the holy Saint Gormgal such an amount of trouble. For during the time that the saint was building his “hermitical retirement” there, he was perpetually tormented by devils in the shape of black choughs, with red legs and bills—two very diabolical traits!—which choughs or devils, so soon as he planted anything, pulled them out again

with their bills—a fact to verify which any one who doubts need only visit the island, which will be found to be void of all cultivation unto this day. Hurrish's father, I was about to remark, was pulling up his lines, for it was getting dark, when suddenly they were almost pulled out of his hands by a tremendous weight. He thought that it must be a dozen fish on at least, but when it got near the surface, he saw a blue mist or jelly, with eyes all over it, and in the middle of this jelly a pea-green face, covered with huge warty knobs, and shiny yellow arms and legs, which waved about in all directions, and—what was naturally still more startling—a large whisky-bottle sticking out of a loose flap of skin about the middle of its body. He had given himself up for lost, but that, happily, he had had an uncle who was learned in such matters, so that he knew at once from his descriptions that this could be no other than Gougalidimus, king of oysters, who was known to frequent these rocks. Accordingly, quick as thought,

he dropped a burning spark into the water out of his pipe, which he was fortunately smoking at the time, whereupon the creature melted away immediately and vanished. For fire is the one thing such supernatural beings cannot endure, as all but the most ignorant are, indeed, well aware.

With these occurrences fresh in his mind, it is not to be wondered at that Hurrish felt doubtful as to the real nature of the accident which had befallen him, and that, in any case, he felt that it was just as well to pocket the insult and descend before worse happened. He descended the cliff accordingly, this time without any unpleasant accompaniments, and gained the little strip of land, on the very edge of which, half-surrounded by water, his boat was lying. It was one of the ordinary curaghs or coracles of the country, consisting of a heavy framework of wood, covered with the tarred canvas which has replaced the traditional ox-hide. The canvas was worn in several places—a serious matter in a boat in which the smallest hole is suffi-

cient to send you without warning to the bottom. Hurrish had brought down his pot of tar, also a bundle of fine twigs tied together, which served as a brush, and accordingly he now set to work at once to patch up the places.

His excitement had by this time passed away, and had taken his anger with it. Man or goblin, whatever it was that had thrown those stones, they had missed him, and therefore, with the help of the saints, might miss him again. By-and-by, as he warmed to his work, he broke out into a new tune—this time a loftier and more heroic strain :—

“ ‘Lord Clare,’ he said, ‘y’ have your wish, there are yer Saxon foes ;’

The marshal almost smiled to see how furiously he goes.

How fierce a look thim ixiles wear, were wont to be so gay ;

The trisured wrongs of tharty years were in their haa-arts to-day ;

Their priesthood hunted down like wolves, their counthry overthrown ;

Each felt as if rivinge for all——”

There was another pause. The coracle required turning. It was a job that generally

needed two men, for though light, these boats were cumbersome to lift. Hurrish, however, required no aid. Stooping, he embraced the huge black thing—so like some ugly, uncouth animal—in his arms, reared it on end by main force, and propped it against a low rock, in which position he could more readily see what was amiss with the bottom. This done, he finished his strain,—

“was shtaked in him alone.

On Fontenoy! on Fontenoy! H-aaa-rk to the wild hurrah!
Rivinge! Rimimber Limerick! Wh-oooo-p! Down wid
the Sasenagh!”

CHAPTER III.

THE UNSEEN POWERS STAND REVEALED.

WHAT Fontenoy was beyond a fight of some sort Hurrish had not a notion. He had not, therefore, the satisfaction of knowing that it really had been a recognised battle—a genuinely respectable European victory,—and a victory, too, due in great part to the prowess of his home-exiled compatriots. It might have been fought in Tierra del Fuego or Nova Scotia, for anything he knew to the contrary. That the Lord Clare who figured in it had fought against England, that much, indeed, was clear to him, and that probably was all he cared to know.

Hurrish possessed an idiosyncrasy which was a very serious scandal to his more

thorough-going friends and relatives. This was a sort of sneaking regard, an acknowledged kindness with which in his heart of hearts he regarded the "ould stock,"—the time-out-of-mind landlords, men as much part of the country they lived in as its rocks, rivers, magpies, or buttercups. For the new-comer, the man of yesterday, of the Encumbered Estates Court—every one who could, rightly or wrongly, be ticketed by the detested word "land-grabber"—his scorn was unmeasured, and his conscience void of reproach. But for the "ould stock,"—the aboriginal landlord so to speak,—the Fitzgeralds, the O'Kellys, the Macmahons, his own O'Briens of Clare—over these and such as these his heart secretly yearned as a brother over erring brothers. This general sentiment was strengthened by a personal one, for there was a member of this degenerate race for whom Hurrish cherished a strong feeling of personal regard, nay, affection, and that one—crowning shame and scandal to relate—was no other than his own landlord!

When Hurrish had been a lad of sixteen, but as stout on his legs and as broad-chested nearly in his ragged corduroy jacket as he was to-day, Mr O'Brien—the “Captin” he was then called—used from time to time to be at home on leave from his regiment, and on these occasions used often to send for his namesake—finding him strong and reasonably intelligent—to carry his game or his fishing-basket as the case might be. The “Captin” and his father were not always upon the best of terms, and the regular gamekeeper, if such a functionary existed, was rarely available. Hurrish was the stanchest of henchmen, and the most admiring. Did a salmon stick—as salmon will stick—amongst the roots and snarls at the bottom of the stream,—Hurrish’s clothes were off in a minute, and he would be in the water, no matter how cold the weather or how swift the current. Was a wild duck lost in the bushes,—Hurrish would stay out all night, but he would find it in the end. He possessed a strong native

fount of admiration, which craved something to expend itself upon, and in those days the "Captin" supplied that need. He was the idol and ideal of his henchman's youthful admiration, and his feats of fishing and shooting a source of as deep a pride as though achieved by himself—rather considerably more so. All this, of course, was changed now; nevertheless, an unacknowledged remnant of his former devotion for the "Captin" still lingered in Hurrish's freeze-covered breast. His was a nature that did not readily drop any habit of kindness it had once formed. Perhaps, too, unconsciously to himself, there was some clannish feeling mingling with this regard, though it may be doubted whether he had ever heard the word. Sentiments revert as well as features, and his forebears had followed the "Captin's" forbears quite often enough and long enough to have cut the sentiment deep into their descendant's consciousness. His mother certainly was guiltless of fostering any such slavish or sycophantic notion! In that

thorough-going woman's eyes, the best landlord and the worst were exactly equal—as to the inquisitors of old, petty distinctions like virtue or vice counted nothing one way or other in the case of a declared heretic. Contrary to the practice of most Irish landlords, Mr O'Brien had never employed an agent, and his dealings with his tenants were, in consequence, all direct and personal. This in Hurrish's case had kept up the kindly feeling, though where no such kindly feeling existed, the dislike, which otherwise might have been diluted by division, had become concentrated and embittered. A man who could get another to do an unpleasant office, and yet persists in doing it himself, must take the consequences, which are not likely to be agreeable !

Meanwhile the beautiful morning was clouding over, as is apt to be the case where every bit of rising ground acts as a cloud detainer. It had begun to rain, though as yet slightly. The sea was moaning, and the tide ran farther and farther up into the narrow

cove, threatening to leave no standing-room. A sudden scud of wind blowing inshore was cutting off the tops of the waves, and sending the froth flying in ragged clots through the air ; a couple of fishing-boats were making all haste to win the little harbour before the gale overtook them ; the very puffins and cormorants were coming shorewards with wild discordant cries, winged by the fury of the squall. Suddenly the rain descended in a perfect deluge, washing over the face of the rocks in a white-edged torrent, and rushing down to meet the incoming waves in a hundred mimic rivulets.

Hurrish, however, went doggedly on with his work. He had never had rheumatism, and cared not a jot for the wet. If one left off what one had in hand for rain in Clare, one would rarely do anything there at all.

Lep was less philosophic. With a yelp full of discomfort he ran up to his master, rubbing his white shaggy head against his knee, as if to entreat him to take shelter. Finding that his appeal was disregarded, he, too, submitted

to the inevitable, declining to take refuge by himself among the rocks as he might have done, and sitting shivering on the soaking sand, his white coat gradually turning to a collection of ragged wisps of wool, as the drenching water soaked it through and through; his brown eyes, ordinarily hidden under their overhanging thatch, becoming large and glittering, like some sort of gelatinous sea organisms which the retreating sea-weeds have left dry.

At length the tarring of the curagh was finished, and Hurrish stood back a little way to contemplate it. It looked more like some strange antediluvian animal than ever—a seal or walrus perhaps, of archaic type, left behind in the march of improvement! The shower was beginning to wear away. There were already clear bits in the middle of the clouds, and away towards Ballyvaughan a ray of sunshine broke in a pallid wistful gleam upon the wet rocks.

Hurrish shook himself. Heavy as it had been, the rain had not penetrated his thick

frieze clothes, and if the sun came out again he should be dry in a trice. He put the coracle right end up, threw away his twig brush, picked up the pot of tar, and prepared to retrace his steps.

Lep, delighted at the thought of getting home, ran on ahead, his mind already filled with the cabin hearth and its heavenly glow, so much better in his experience than any delusive sunlight. His master delayed a few minutes longer in order to secure the boat with a rope passed round the corner of one of the big rocks, already worn smooth by that service. He was about to mount the path when a sudden howl of anguish, followed by yelp upon yelp of pain and terror, reached him from above. With a bound he was at the cliff and beginning to mount. He had not gone many yards before he paused, riveted to the spot by what he saw. On a sort of outlier of rock, a little to the left of where he was standing, stood his enemy, Mat Brady, with an evil grin on his hideous brutalised face, and alas !

alas ! in his throttling grasp poor faithful white-coated Lep, his master's inseparable companion ever since five years ago he had saved him from drowning as a pup.

The dog's fate was evident. The other brute was going to throw him over the cliff, only delaying, in fact, in order to enhance the agony, and his own consequent enjoyment of it. Hurrish started forward. Lep caught sight of his master, and again and again howled for help. Hurrish redoubled his efforts, but the distance was still considerable. Before he could reach the spot the deed would have been done, and the doer of it safe from pursuit.

Once, twice, Mat Brady had swung the dog over the yawning height. The third time he was about to launch him upon his fatal journey, when—not his arms, but—his legs were suddenly pinioned fast from behind.

A wild tatterdemalion figure, with white vacant face, starting eyes, and long lank hair streaming in the wind, had sprung up,

it was not easy to say from where, and had delayed the execution.

“Hould him tight thin, Thady, more power to ye! Thunder and turf, hould him till I git t’ him!” Hurrish shouted from below.

His astonishment over, Mat Brady’s native brutality returned in all its force. With a howl of fury he turned and clutched the new-comer by the throat, necessarily dropping Lep, who thereupon took to his heels, never resting until he was once more safe under his master’s shield. It seemed at first as if one victim was simply going to be substituted for another. Mat Brady’s clutch was upon the new-comer’s throat, and he was dragging him nearer and nearer to the brink. Now one foot was over it; now the other; now he was all but gone. Happily Hurrish was by this time close at hand, and with a hideous execration, and a kick which stretched his victim full length upon the very verge, Mat Brady broke away, betaking himself once more to the rocks, and scrambling over the rifts with that odd shambling gait of his, more like the ungainly move-

ment of a sloth or some such plantigrade animal than anything more distinctively human.

Hurrish did not attempt to follow. He stood still and watched him, an expression of dark animosity settling down upon his good-looking placable face.

“Rin! trath ye’d bether rin!” he muttered. “Maybe y’ havn’t forgot th’ batin I gave ye last Michelmas was a twilvemonth! But what’s the good of a batin to the loikes of you? All the batin in life wudn’t bate dacency into ye, so’t wudn’t. ’Tis *shootin’* ye want, ye baste of the world, an’ I’d shoot ye as riddy as an ould scauld-crow any day in the week if it wasn’t for Morry. Poor Morry! God help ye for a misfortunate gossoon! ’Tis an iligant brother ye have, achorra, sure an’ sartin; an’ ’tishn’t the ind of him we’ve seen neither, more’s the pity!”

CHAPTER IV.

INTRODUCES THE READER TO A FOOL AND
A PHILOSOPHER.

THADY CONNOR, or Thady-na-Taggart, was the idiot or “natural” of Tubbamina. Village idiots, once common institutions in England, are now scarce—increasing civilisation, or possibly increasing dislike to people who give trouble, having tended to cause their disappearance, or their concentration in the parish workhouse. In Ireland, civilisation has not yet reached this point, and the village idiot is still a recognised member of the community—nay, an appreciated one. The “natural” only does rather better what every one else does more or less—namely, as little as possible. As a mere standard of

comparison, too, and as a pleasant stimulus to complacency, he can never be other than a somewhat popular institution.

Out of all the neighbourhood of Tubbamina there was no fire to which Thady-na-Taggart gravitated with so unhesitating a readiness as to Hurrish O'Brien's, or so profound a certainty of a hearty welcome. Poor Thady had a dumb passionate affectionateness that is to be found in hardly any perfectly sane citizens, and only in a few exceptionally natured dogs. For those he loved he would cheerfully have walked into the fire or into the sea had they requested him to do so. When Hurrish went for a day's fishing, Thady would wade out waist-deep to meet him upon his return, to help to pull in the boat, and to caper round him with fond gesture of affection and exuberance, like some uncouth but tender-hearted cow or colt.

Thady was no respecter of persons. Even before the recent socialistic illumination, the difference between frieze coat and broad-cloth was practically non-existent for him.

He would sit on his heels, with a laugh of derision on his face, when Sir Thomas MacDoual, who owned half Tubbamina, rode by. Even when his lordship, the lord Bishop of Killagobbet, came to open the new parish church, Thady, to the scandal of all his relatives—the female ones especially—declined to get up or pay any respect to that august prelate, so that they were obliged to stand in a cluster before him, with petticoats extended, curtsying down to the ground in order to avert the curse of heaven from his contumacious head.

The thoughts of an idiot are mysteries! Like dreams, or the visions of a man under chloroform, they need an exponent. That Thady did think was evident, for his lips would work rapidly, and his forehead knit, and he would mutter half expressed words, which sounded like arguments or expostulations addressed to some unseen auditor. There was no one, however, to interpret these arguments,—certainly no one at Tubbamina; so that, like other veiled sayings of

greater celebrity, their secret remained for ever locked up in their utterer's own breast.

When Hurrish O'Brien reached the scene of the late conflict, he found poor Thady sitting up and rubbing his head, the back of which had sustained several severe contusions against the pointed stones at the top of the cliff. Even although your head may not be worth very much when it is whole, a hurt to the back of it is probably quite as uncomfortable as though it were the honoured brain-box of a Solon or a Solomon. Poor Thady's innocent face was puckered up like a baby's, preparatory to a cry. It was evident that he was in considerable pain.

Hurrish supplied probably the best immediately available remedy by rushing up, grasping him warmly by the hand, and thanking him again and again for his timely support, Lep playing a good second by wagging his tail and licking his defender's hand—an act of politeness which he had never before condescended to perform to this poor shred and outcast of humanity.

If he did not understand all that they intended to convey, Thady at least took in the general meaning, his poor vacant white face growing suddenly rosy with delight. He did not say anything, but he opened and shut his mouth a great many times in succession, each time emitting an odd jerking noise, something like the click of a lock, or the startled note of the bald coot. It was poor Thady - na - Taggart's way of laughing.

When he had a little recovered, Hurrish helped him to his feet, and took him back with him, supporting his steps carefully over the rocks. Lep, much subdued by his late experience, followed close "at heel," glancing nervously to right and left for fear of a fresh surprise. Once, when they were passing a suspicious-looking shieling, whose roofless walls rose grey and forlorn over the stony platform, he might have been observed to wriggle round to the far-side of his master, so as to interpose that substantial barrier between himself and it.

Another time when a fieldfare rose suddenly out of a ferny fissure where, for lack of better retreat, it had built its nest, Lep trembled violently from head to foot, and was some minutes before he recovered his equanimity. His nerves, it was evident, were seriously upset !

Some time before they reached the cabin, its blunt gable-ends could be seen rising over the grey encompassing brows of rock. It stood so completely detached from everything else, that it seemed to be considerably larger than it actually was. The solid stone walls had happily never been whitewashed, so that years, instead of degrading them to a duck-etty grey with inky streaks, had endowed them with a delightfully diffusive crop of yellow lichens, which produced in sunlight a golden and gleaming effect. Another advantage was, that the enormous size of the material and stoniness of the surroundings lent a certain air of stern and arid purity to the immediate neighbourhood of the house. There was no repulsive muck-heap before the

door, and no puddled mud. Instead, there were enormous paving - flags — natural, not artificial—which it took four of Hurrish's longest strides to traverse, and upon which the house seemed to stand as if just set down upon them out of a box. Everything, save the actual building itself, was upon the same Brobdingnagian scale. A low wall, that encircled three sides of the cabin, was built of gigantic oblong pieces of stone, amongst which might be seen the dismembered trunk of a cross,—not in its present condition recognised as such. There was no porch, but on one side of the door had been erected a side-screen, of the kind known as a *lascaur*—an obvious necessity, where the wind often drives with a force that would blow a stray child or loose piece of furniture straight up the chimney. And this *lascaur* consisted mainly of a single block of stone, which might have come in usefully in building the great Pyramid, and which looked like a legacy left from the days of King Goll MacMorna and his eight hundred giants.

Old Bridget was sitting as usual over the fire, stirring the pot for the mid-day meal. At sight of her son, however, she at once sprang up, and came forward with gleaming eyes to meet him.

“Hurrish, avick, whar have ye been? Have ye heard what happened this day? glory be to God and the saints for the same! Buggle—the little black villin that was servin’ writs, ye know—he’s *dead*. The boys dun for him on yesternight at the Killimaney cross-roads! An’ my blessin’ an’ the blessin’ of heaven be upon thim for the same, Amen! Arrah, where were ye, not to be lendin’ a hand? That I should have a son—a growd man—the strongest and biggest man in the counthry,—and him never strikin’ a blow wid the rist!”

Hurrish made no immediate reply. Somehow this excellent piece of news did not seem particularly to raise his spirits. This was not the sort of warfare that had warmed his heart, and filled his head, as he painted his boat in the Tullymaney saleen.

“Sure I hard the crature was lame, mither,” he said, in a tone of expostulation. “’Tisn’t much killin’ he’d take, God help him!”

“Lame!” Bridget’s eyes blazed, and she set her teeth like a tigress. “An’ is’t *his* part ye’re takin’, now? Faith it wanted but that! *His* part!—the dirty spalpeen,—the black Pratestant whilp! Lame?” she went on, raising her voice louder and louder,—“I warrant ye, he’s lame enough now, anyhow! Limpin’ down the road to hell, that’s what he is doin’ this minute, the little thievin’ Shingann! Och, an’ I’d give me two eyes to see it, so I would! I’d laugh,—I’d laugh till the tears rin down me cheeks, only to see him goin’!”

“Whist, mither, whist! My God! is it a woman ye are, at all, at all? Ye make me ’shamed, ye do. D’ye think the crature hadn’t a mither, too—one that’s cryin’ her heart out for him most like this minute, God hilp her! I’m not sayin’ that he oughtn’t to hav been shtopt,” Hurrish continued, rather shocked apparently at his own

heretical humanity. "But to be baten to death!—an' him all by hisself—by a hape of big men! Och, mither 'cushla, 'taint that way ould Oireland's to be freed anyhow. 'Tis thim sort o' doin's that makes the Cause be 'bused, so it do! A dozen big men settin' on one poor trimblin' little bodagh, and batin' the life out on him wid shticks at night! 'Tis cold my blood is this very minute, to think ov it."

"'Twasn't sticks at all, so that shows how much ye know. 'Twas *shtones* they dun it with," Bridget said sullenly.

"Will, 'sn't that wurst, if anythink? If he was to be kilt, sure shootin' ud be the marcifulest."

"Och, wud ye be takin' powder and shot to the loikes of that?" she retorted with fine scorn. "'Twould be like takin' the fire-shovel to kill a flea; so 'twud—no better."

Hurrish said no more. The relative advisability of shooting a process-server or stoning him to death did not, perhaps, seem to him to be worth a domestic argument. Still he

felt disturbed. It was not the mode of warfare which he would have preferred.

Thady-na-Taggart was meanwhile sitting huddled up on the stool which had been set for him,—the two boys, who had just come in from school, making furtive faces at him whenever their father's back was turned. He was dimly aware when people were talking around him, but what they were talking about he had not a notion. As for taking part in any conversation himself, he had never done such a thing in his life! He was as nearly dumb, in fact, as any creature born with the complete use of his tongue and his palate could be. What conversation he had was either with himself, or with the magpies and saddle-crows, whom he was sometimes set to scare. At present he was employed in counting his fingers, and seemed to find the calculation inconveniently abstruse.

Old Bridget—of whom he was desperately afraid, and was secretly watching under his eyelashes—stalked about the cabin, swinging her skinny arms, and making a clean

sweep of any one who ventured to approach her. Lep, who was peeping innocently into a pot, on the chance of finding something edible in it, received a kick which sent him yelping back to his master. She was certainly not an agreeable old woman this ! Looking at her at such moments, you would have been irresistibly reminded of those historic beldames who, from time to time, have revelled in perfect carnivals of horrors. In times of revolution she would have been certain to have come conspicuously to the front. Her wrinkled face would have been a sort of inevitable accompaniment to the gibbet or the guillotine, and in more irregular executions she would probably have developed into a perfect demon of ingenuity,—one of those horrible, but unfortunately not impossible, incarnations of cruelty that make hideous the last moments of murdered men.

There was not a redeeming point, not a touch of softness or tenderness, anywhere in her whole composition, with the exception, perhaps, of the inevitable she-wolf's love for

the offspring she herself has borne. No tenderness, no weakness, no submission disarmed her. Alley Sheehan's fragile girlish beauty, for instance, had never moved her to anything but hatred. She could have turned her out a dozen times to starve, if Hurrish would only have let her. In vain the poor child tried to conciliate her with untiring submissiveness; her very sweetness and gentleness seemed only an additional incentive to the other's rage, as is by no means unfrequently the case. The poor girl used to wake at night in an agony of terror, thinking that Bridget was standing over her, or that she was shouting some order which she had failed to obey. The very sound of her voice made her tremble painfully; indeed it was not unfrequently followed by the discharge of some handy missile, such as a bottle or a broken seat of a chair, sometimes—more terribly still—by personal chastisement, administered by her own hard and merciless hands. Alley never complained to Hurrish of these persecutions. She used to run away whenever she

could, and hide herself amongst the rocks, and when evening came she would cry herself to sleep, night after night, in the little black corner of the inner room which she shared with Katty, the baby of the O'Brien brood. She had a longing, amounting often to absolute agony, for a mother's care, or for some womanly tenderness;—it was the strongest yearning by far of her nature. She was too much of a child still herself to take the children to her heart, otherwise than as playfellows, often as fellow-victims; and to have revealed her own innermost feelings to any man, even Hurrish, would have been utterly wounding to her feelings of delicacy.

Poor little Alley Sheehan ! Hers was certainly the tiniest atom of a mind that could readily be conceived, comparing unfavourably probably in several important particulars with that of many a well-instructed cat or dog. What there was of it, however, was pure as crystal—pure as one of those rock-girt pools amongst the crests of the mountains she could

see across the bay,—pools into which nothing looked but the floating clouds, the cold white moon, the great encompassing galaxies of stars. There was a sort of petal-like delicacy of texture about her moral and spiritual nature, an alpine flower bloom and fragrance, which is rare, as all fine things are rare, but not rarer, I conceive, in her class than in any other; a sensitiveness, too, which made all unkindness cut like a lash, and which lent a terrible strength to her gaunt old tyrant's ferocity. Hurrish was well aware of all this, and though, with a mixture of indolence and traditional reverence, he never directly reproved his mother, he was often on the watch to intervene, generally jocosely and as if accidentally, between her and her victim. Alley, in her turn, knew this, and her gratitude flew out to him for it in a perpetual benediction. She loved Hurrish as she loved God! There was no idea of irreverence in the juxtaposition of the two ideas. Her mind, in fact, was too simple, too inherently limited, to admit of any large or compli-

cated variety of emotions. It was an instrument of but few strings, but those few were exquisitely strung.

A shadow came to the cabin-door. Hurrish turned, and his face lit up with pleasure, while Bridget's grew if anything rather darker. An old man stood there, a very small and wrinkled old man, neatly dressed in an old tail-coat with brass buttons, corduroy knee-breeches, blue stockings, and a high black beaver hat, considerably bent but well brushed, who came forward with a polite salutation and the old-fashioned greeting, "God save all here!"

Hurrish went to meet him with hands outstretched.

"Phil Rooney, is that yerself! Come in, man, yer welcome kindly. Clancy, go git a chair out of the bedroom for Mr Rooney—d'ye hear me, ye clip, be shmart! Maybe ye'll stip down to the little bit of pasture, though," he added rather hastily. "There's a baste I bought last Tuam was a twelve-month, I'd take it kindly if y'd throw yer

oye over him. 'Tis wakely the creature seems, whatever ails it."

Phil Rooney was a man of a type and generation fast passing away. He and an old maiden sister lived quite alone in a small cabin upon the main road to Ennis, and save when appealed to on some farriery question, upon which he was an acknowledged expert, he rarely stirred off his own little bit of land. After his rent was paid he was worth perhaps at most ten pounds a-year, and without the smallest accusation of exaggeration he might be called a finished gentleman, if self-respect and the most perfect breeding in the world are the essentials of that disputed term. Whatever admirable qualities the new proletariat may attain to, when the present frothy effervescence subsides, that particular type, it is to be feared, it never can resuscitate. It is doomed, like the elk or the old Irish wolf-hound,—productions which, once extinct in a country, are extinct in it for ever and ever.

The young fellows of Tubbamina thought

very little of old Phil Rooney. He was but a poor patriot to begin with. The great lights of America had been flashed in his eyes, but they had been flashed in vain. He was too old-fashioned properly to appreciate the merits of the great dynamite propaganda, and even the simpler home-grown methods of carrying on the warfare were often quite beyond him. When that fine young fellow, Hyacinth Rutty, for instance, was retailing before a sympathetic audience the part he had himself taken in the execution of Mr Dempster of Rath's bailiff, who had been set upon one night by twenty armed men, killed, and hastily buried in a bog, old Rooney got up, before that exciting tale was even completed, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, pocketed it, and walked slowly out of the cabin, though it was raining a perfect deluge as it happened at the moment.

The only one of the younger generation who really appreciated him and enjoyed his conversation was Hurrish O'Brien; but then Hurrish himself, as we have seen, was con-

sidered a very second-rate sort of patriot by the more out-and-out spirits of the neighbourhood.

The two men went down the little hill together;—an odd contrast, one so big, broad, and stalwart, in his loose ill-fitting clothes; the other so small, neat, precise, like a model of an Irishman upon a bog-oak inkstand. In his anxiety about the cow, and still more perhaps to avoid a quarrel, Hurrish had forgotten all about poor Thady. No sooner, however, had the idiot perceived that his protector had departed than he too sprang from his stool, and fled out of the cabin and after them in full pursuit down the hill. He would just as soon have remained shut up with an unchained lioness—if he had ever heard of so dangerous an animal—as with old Bridget in her present humour! When he reached the little field, Hurrish and Phil Rooney were already standing beside the cow, the former explaining the symptoms, the latter—a pair of big horn spectacles perched upon his nose—feeling the patient's pulse, and

forming a diagnosis with all the dignity and importance of a Court physician. Poor Thady—idiot though he was—was as sensitive as any high-flown lover as to the sentiments of those he cared for. Seeing, therefore, after a few minutes' patient waiting, that he was not wanted, and that his presence had not even been perceived, he stole silently away, getting slowly and laboriously over the rough ground, his white lack-lustre face and queer bleached tatterdemalion garments constituting as perfect a resemblance to his stony surroundings as ever the coat or feathers of arctic bird or beast to its eternal snow-fields.

The absorbing interest of the cow's illness over, and its future treatment decided upon, the conversation of the other two lapsed, as a matter of course, to the day's tragedy, which both agreed in regretting, though both held the unfortunate Buggle to be primarily responsible for his own fate,—a process-server, as every reasonable person knows, having no more human rights than a stoat, and being

liable, like that vermin, to be killed whenever met with.

“ I wud wunder a dacent man wud do it, yis, indeed,” Old Rooney said in his cracked treble. (English was a foreign language to him, and at home he never spoke anything but his native tongue, whereas Hurrish, like most of the younger generation, preferred the former,—despite its name, by the way, which will doubtless be changed for the better when the new Irish Republic finds time to look about it.)

“ I’m not sayin’ he oughtn’t to ha’ been shtopped,” he observed, in response to his friend’s remark. “ Don’t mistake me, Phil. But shtones!—they’re nasty cruel things shtones is! The blood rins cowld through my body when I think of that cratur all by hisself—rinnin’ for the bare life, an’ beggin an’ prayin’ ov thim to let him off, and they throwin’ the stones at him an’ laughin’! Lord! I can see it ’s if I’d been there! an’ the moon gallivantin’ along the sky the way it does, an’ not carin’ th’ half

of a ratten pittatee what goes on underneath ! An' niver a one nigh him—less God, maybe," Hurrish added, with a considerable doubt in his mind as to whether God would have anything to say to a process-server. "'Twas only yesterday one of the bhoys telled me some wan ax'd him if he wasn't 'feared to be goin' about the counthry servin' writs an' such-like, an' that he ups an' says no, for he knew they'd niver touch a hair ov his head, 'case of his bein' a cripple an' not able for to defend hisself ! Och, Phil ! man alive, 'taint that way the counthry's to be righted, howsomedever ! What, killin' a man here and killin' a man there, and frightenin' a lot of poor foolish colleens, wid rushin' in to the houses in the dead of the night, cuttin' off their hair, an makin' them sware—the divil a bit they know what ! Dishtroying dumb bastes, too, that never did no one any harm. Sure, that's not *fightin'* ! D'ye think th' *English*—me curses on thim—care how many of wan anither we dishtroy ? Isn't that what they're

wantin', the bliggards? I'm not spakin', mind ye, agin the Laigue—God defend it—only I wish they'd make thim shtop this potterin' sort of work intoirely, an' pass the word for the risin'. 'Tis fightin' we want, an' fightin' *men*, not cows and colleens!"

Phil Rooney took out his snuff-box—a brass one with a medallion of the Liberator on the top. He was a philosopher, and opined that a great deal of fuss was made by young men who had not had *his* experience. *He* could remember the pre-famine days and the rising of '48, and Macmanus, and O'Doherty, and Meagher of the Sword, and most of the heroes of a generation ago, and it was his opinion that the time had now come when what the country wanted was peace and quietness. Of the modern race of agitators he did not hesitate to profess the profoundest contempt.

"There's bad times and there's good times," he said sententiously in Irish, "and I don't see that there's so very much amiss with these. If you young fellows had seen the

times *I* have, you might talk ! Why, I remember in Ballysadare, when there were forty-three corpses lying dead at one time ! Forty-three ! yes, indeed, and they didn't need to be buried either to be skeletons most of them ! The changes too ! Why, I can remember when it was all the *masters* the bailiffs was after ! Did I ever tell you of the time a bailiff came down to Lugnaskeagh, all the way from London it was, with a writ for the master ? A terrible wild man he was, Sir Malachy O'Donel, God rest his soul, but there wasn't a boy on the place wouldn't have died and gone to jail for him, so there wasn't. Well, the bailiff man brought the writ all the way over the sea—a fine upstanding young fellow, with a blue waistcoat, and a gold watch, and a necktie right up to his chin. And he wanted, right or wrong, to get up to the house to serve it on the master. But if he did, the boys caught him just as he was reaching the great door, and nothing would do them but he must eat it ; and eat it he did, sure enough,—paper,

and ink, and seals, and all, and the sputtering and the fighting!—oh, wirrastrue, wirrastrue! that *was* a sight. And his honour, Sir Malachy, peeping out behind the window-curtains all the while, and laughing fit to split. And when the last bit of paper was eaten, and the young man had gone away, spitting, and swearing to have the law on them, he came out and gave them a glass of whisky all round, and they hurrahed—I was only a slip of a gossoon myself at the time—they hurrahed, so you'd have heard them at Gort! Seems odd to remember now, when it's nothing but killing the landlords will do them," Phil added, with another philosophic sniff out of the brass snuff-box.

Hurrish laughed loud and long at this story, though, as will easily be imagined, he had heard it a few times before. He loved old Phil Rooney's yarns, and often felt a secret regret that he had not himself belonged to an earlier generation. The faction-fights, scrimmages, and "divarsions" generally of a

generation or two ago, seemed to him to be of a much more delectable type than anything which came in a man's way nowadays. Not that there was any lack of fighting or head-breaking either, thank God, but it all seemed to have grown duller somehow. There was too much earnest about it all. Men killed one another for *reasons*, not from pure love and friendliness. You took measures to rid yourself of any one, as you might take measures to rid your house of rats; there was no risk or "intertainment" about it at all. Now Hurrish was sportsman enough to think a game decidedly the better for a spice of danger!

CHAPTER V.

AN ENLIGHTENED VARIETY OF PATRIOTISM.

WHILE this conversation was going on, the two men had left the small green oases, and were making their way up the stony sides of Gortnacoppin, above the rapid stream which ran white as milk over its boulder-strewn bed. Hurrish rented one-half of this valley from Mr O'Brien of Donore, and kept sheep upon it—goat-like creatures, which appeared to feed upon the stones, there was so little else to be seen. What grass there was, however, was sweet and good, like all the Burren pasture; nor was their hunger to be balked even by the deep stony rifts which seemed set there for the express purpose of breaking their legs, but into which they

complacently poked their noses as into so many recognised food-troughs.

A little higher up, the stream they had been following suddenly disappeared, as the way of streams is in these thirsty limestone regions. The valley thereupon changed its character. From a roughly sawn trench, broken in every direction with loose boulders, and presenting all the appearance of a half-emptied stone quarry, it suddenly became a symmetrical bowl, rising in an architectural-looking crescent, the lines of stratification following directly one above the other, like the seats of an amphitheatre. All over the Burren this oddly architectural effect presents itself. You are brought face to face with a frowning fortress, outworks, glacis, ramparts, all complete ; or you drop suddenly into a stony amphitheatre, with orderly ranges of seats one above the other, which appear to be only waiting for some dilatory audience. In this instance the human part of the scene was represented by two sets of habitations, ruins both of them, but ruins of widely

different dates. One a group of cabins—deserted perhaps twenty years back—roofless, bleary-eyed, smoke-blackened,—repellent even in their very piteousness; the other a group of those far-famed “clochauns” or beehive oratories, which rejoice the soul of the antiquary in these Celtic solitudes. Mysterious looking, wigwam-like abodes, built of undressed stones, put together without the aid of mortar, larger stones projecting here and there, like sticks out of a bird’s nest. A doorway at one side—the doorway of a dog-kennel—averaging perhaps three feet and a half in height, and over this doorway a window, five, or in unusually boldly-proportioned specimens six inches across, while over this window again five white quartz pebbles set perpendicularly and three horizontally combine to make a little cross, looking at a distance as if splashed in in whitewash. Three of these Liliputian cells—all that remained of a once populous monastery—dotted the grey floor of the amphitheatre. Fancy pictured the

wild head of an Irish monk—say about the year 850—protruded through his doorway of a morning, like his cousin the hermit-crab's through the mouth of its shell, while its owner—crouched necessarily upon all fours—looked round the valley and considered the prospects of breakfast !

Our two friends paused a moment and looked up this stony valley, which was threaded by a tiny path trodden by the feet of passers-by, and leading to the high-road which lay upon the other side of the next ridge. Some one was descending this path—a tall young man, dressed, not like Hurrish and his old companion in rough home-spun frieze, but in one of those suits of ready-made tweed which are rapidly taking the place of the older costume all over the country. A well-built, well-looking young fellow, showing a pale, rather sun-deepened complexion, close-cropped hair, large reddish moustache, and a chin betokening firmness, not to say obstinacy. A pleasant face and an intelligent one, yet

a face, none the less, which seemed meant to warn you not to quarrel, if you could conveniently avoid it, with its owner.

Hurrish's own genial face lit up with pleasure at sight of the new-comer.

"Maurice Brady himself!" he shouted, long before they were within speaking distance. "The top of the mornin' and the best of good luck to you, Morry, me boy; an' where have ye hid yerself this month ov Sundays? 'Tis sick for the sight of you I've been, an' some wan else too, that ye'd maybe think more ov," he added meaningly as the young man drew nearer.

Maurice Brady's mother and Hurrish had been first-cousins, had spent their childhood next door to one another, and had made mud-pies beside the same puddles. It had been a bad day for the poor woman when she was tormented by her relations into marrying old Michael Brady, the widower, and going to live in his dirty cabin on the top of the ridge which divided Gortnacoppin from Ballynadugal. The father was no

sooner dead than the brutal son had turned upon the unfortunate woman, and had literally harried her out of existence,—the first quarrel between him and Hurrish arising out of the latter's interference on her behalf. After his stepmother's death, some compunction seemed to have come over the savage, or natural feelings may have asserted themselves, for his treatment of his brother, though bad enough, was, comparatively speaking, humane. The boy had been considered to show a turn for learning, and it had even been at one time proposed that he should be sent to Maynooth. This, however, as the time drew nearer, he had himself strongly resisted, the limitations of a priest's life, however balanced by other advantages, having absolutely no charms for him.

Like every Irishman of the reigning generation, Maurice Brady cherished dreams of ambition,—dreams, too, by no means destitute, as it seemed to him, of solid foundations. If every recruit of the Grand Army carried a marshal's baton in his knapsack, surely

every Nationalist recruit, that can read, write, and spell, carries an appointment in the coming Irish Republic somewhere or other about his personal possessions. Why not? Was there not young Egan Shaughnessy, who had been foreman only the other day in the same little haberdashery shop at Miltown-Malbay in which Maurice Brady himself served, and what was he now? Member for Polladoo, and likely to rise to any dizzy height so soon as the Nationalists began really to warm to their work! Maurice had taught himself shorthand in his leisure moments, and had already done a certain amount of newspaper work. It was only for the 'Killogenesawee Shillelagh and Flag of Ballyduff,' it is true, at present, but then everything in life, we know, depends upon a beginning.

He had other tastes, however, besides his ambition—besides, that is to say, what he called his patriotism. He was a young man of remarkably good taste, in fact, considering his opportunities; and Alley Sheehan's great grey eyes—wasted as they were upon most

of her contemporaries—had had their full effect upon him. From his boyhood Hurrish's cabin had been far more of a home to him than the one he had lived in. Small, dark, and uninviting as it would have seemed to most people, with its hermetically sealed windows and immovable atmosphere of peat-smoke, it was a palace in comparison with the foul hovel in which he and his brother had herded together ;—a palace, too, lit by kind voices and friendly looks—for even the termagant Bridget had in those days had a good word for the handsome, quick-witted lad, who seemed born to reflect credit upon his belongings. As for Hurrish, his pride and delight in young Brady were simply limitless. His own literary attainments were strictly confined to being able to spell out the contents of the dirty little newspaper which went the rounds of the hamlet, and was often a week old, and nearly in pieces, before it reached his hands. Like every member of his class, he had a profound reverence, however, for education in the abstract,

—“Larnin’s a load aisy carried,” being one of the commonest sayings to be heard upon an Irish peasant’s lips. Maurice Brady’s learning was not, perhaps, a very formidable burden at present, still he was a promising youngster unquestionably, and so regarded by most people, Hurrish foremost. “Bedad an’ ’tis a gran’ man he’ll be yit, niver *you* fear!” was his invariable reply to those cavilling remarks which even the most conspicuous merit in so invidious a world is unfortunately always liable to.

When Maurice first announced his wish to marry Alley, Hurrish had given a ready consent, and it was settled that the marriage was to take place as soon as Maurice could venture to support a wife. Since then, matters however had changed. Fresh feuds had broken out between the two houses, and it seemed but too likely that in Tubbamina to-day, as in Verona of old, the hopes of the lovers were to be the sacrifice.

After a while, old Phil Rooney, between whom and the new-comer there seemed to

be no very warm sympathy, took his departure, betaking himself to the narrow thread-like path leading to the top of the ridge, his small bent figure in its grey antique dress seeming to merge into the rocks as it vanished slowly in the distance. As soon as he was safely out of hearing, Maurice Brady stopped short, and pointed towards the opposite side of the valley,—

“Hurrish, I’m afeared Mat means to have Maloney’s farm,” he said abruptly.

Ye don’t mane it, Morry ! Sure ’tis more nor his life’s worth. The boys’ll kill him sure as they would a jack-snipe !”

“He won’t stop for that !” the other answered, not without a touch of pride. “If Mat’s mind is made up to have it, have it he will, if every soldier out of Dublin is brought to guard it.” He looked across the valley at this so-called farm—a wild mizmaze of rocks with small “fat” hollows at intervals,—the sort of “farm” to make a Norfolk or Leicestershire farmer’s eyes start out of his head. Yet it was one which in

ordinary times commanded a good rent, and, —stranger still—was worth it too.

“What I’m most afraid of,” he went on, after a minute, “is about him and you. I don’t know what’s come to him lately, but he’s like a man distraught. I was up at Slievefoore on my way here, and had to wait as he was out, and when he came in he was cursing—I never heard him so bad—raving and swearing he’d have yer blood,—and not drunk either,” the brother added, meditatively.

Hurrish’s good-humoured brow grew dark.

“He was nigh upon killing poor Lep this mornin’,” he said, frowning at the recollection. “Begorra, if ’t hadn’t been for thinkin’ of you, Morry, I’d ha’ throttled the life out of him thin and there. Be my sowl, yis!”

Young Brady made no answer, but he, too, frowned. Mat’s doings had long been beyond defence, still he was his brother, and he had too deep-rooted a self-respect not to consider that this fact imparted to

him an importance not his own. It offended him that Hurrish should make such a speech in *his* hearing.

"Is Alley 't home?" he inquired rather haughtily, after they had walked on some way in silence. It was not often he allowed himself to slip into such colloquialisms, for, like most aspirants to distinction, he kept an anxious guard over his tongue. With old acquaintances, however, old habits are apt to break out.

"She is, Morry avick—but sure, I'm fear'd ye'd betther not come in," Hurrish said apologetically. "What wid these goin's on of Mat's, an' wan thing an' another, *herself's* jist fit to be tied. Sure ye know yerself how 'twas last toime?"

Maurice did know unpleasantly well. Old Bridget had set upon him with broom and mop, and had fairly driven him away, threatening to upset the boiling potato-pot over him if he came again.

"I never see Alley now at all," he answered, irritably. "It's an uncommonly

queer way of being engaged to a girl, never setting eyes upon her from month's end to month's end, and I'm not going to stand it much longer either, what's more," he added, fiercely.

"'Tis indade, Morry. Thru for ye, me poor bhoy," Hurrish said, deprecatingly. 'Taint no doin' of mine, anyhow. I'll tell ye what, now," he added, brightening up under a sudden inspiration; "come ov Wi'nsday. *Herself* ull be at Tullalogue wid the spring chickens, an' you'll find the coast clane an' clear, an' n'er a one in it 't all, only just little Alley herself and the childer."

Maurice Brady made no answer. The picture was inspiriting certainly, still he did not choose to relax too soon in his offended deportment. He knew very well that, in point of fact, it was not Hurrish's fault, beyond the weakness, that is, of yielding for peace' sake to old Bridget's furious animosities. He was out of humour, however, and not inclined, therefore, to make the admission. Besides, it was never

necessary to stand upon ceremony with Hurrish.

“All right—I’ll come on Wednesday,” he said, at last. “Mind you tell Alley so. I’ll not go on now, as it seems there’s no use,” he added, stopping short. “I promised Phil Donellan to look him up some time before he sailed, and I mightn’t get another chance.”

He nodded to Hurrish, and turned abruptly away and along a narrow “bohereen,” between two loose lacework walls leading in the direction of Tubbamina. The other man stood still for several minutes, wistfully watching the tall active figure striding rapidly along, until it had turned the next corner and was lost to sight. Maurice, however, never looked back. He knew that Hurrish was fonder of him than of any other creature in the world—his own children and Alley barely excepted,—and perhaps this knowledge gave him a sense of power over the older, stronger, more tender-natured man. It is not, we all know, an unfrequent source of superiority.

It would be difficult to imagine two men, born under almost identical circumstances, more unlike than those two who had just parted upon the ridge of Gortnacoppin. To Hurrish, life in general—past, present, and future—was all part of an abounding mystery, which might be understood perhaps by Father Denahy, or other competent authorities, but into which he himself never dreamt of probing. He was a devout Catholic, and had a tolerably clear conception of a penal region in which unconverted Protestants and other enemies of Ireland would form the principal portion of the population. As for those more cheerful realms to which he would wish to be himself translated, they were to a great extent confused and mixed up with traditions of the O’Brasil, Tir-nan-oge, and other paradises of departed Celtic heroes, which he constantly scanned the Atlantic in hopes of catching a glimpse of, and in whose reality he believed very nearly as emphatically.

Maurice Brady professed Catholicism, of

course, and duly attended mass, but he certainly never troubled his head about any future, orthodox or unorthodox. Life was far too clear and sharply defined for him to need to expand his horizon in such unprofitable directions. His intellectual fabric, if not very wide-reaching, was, at least, remarkably compact and coherent. He had not to lay it to his conscience that he had ever wasted his opportunities, or allowed foolishly sentimental considerations to stand in his way. Clever young men, born under peasants' roofs, often waste half their time in escaping from their early ties. The chrysalis is set fast in its native soil, and its earliest efforts are all spent in breaking free from that unyielding matrix. They are tied to their hide-bound belongings by knots which they find it hard to unloose, and which unites their hearts to a state of things from which the intellectual side of them is in perpetual revolt. This had never been Maurice Brady's case. With the exception of his affection for Alley—a very gracious

and condescending sort of affection—he had no tender threads to break. His brother it would have been difficult to feel very warmly towards; and as regards Hurrish, his early boyish admiration for that redoubtable son of Anak had long become modified by a very clear-sighted appreciation of his intellectual capacity. Hurrish's primitive patriotism, for instance, was a source of immeasurable amusement to his more clear-sighted friend,—it was so inconceivably old-fashioned and infantine. His besotted affection for that wretched stony soil upon which he happened to have been born, was another trait which naturally moved his pity. Far from wasting any affection upon it himself, he would have been only too delighted to have been assured that he was never to set eyes on it again. *His* likes and dislikes were all rational ones, in fact, founded upon reason, not merely instinctive and animal-like. Even his hatred of England was a purely conventional hatred. It was the “correct thing” to hate it, and therefore

he did so. He had a considerable gift of words, and could at any moment have risen to any required height of foaming sound and fury had he been called upon to do so ; but it would have been a purely oratorical and dramatic fury. There was not an atom of uncomfortable heat or bitterness about it. It was a profession, and, as times went, not a bad profession either, but that was all.

All over Ireland this marked severance is growing up between the younger, educated or half educated peasant or peasant's son, whose aspirations are all Americanised, progressive, modern, and the earlier, ruder type of peasant-farmer, whose union with the actual piece of soil he cultivates—or does not cultivate—amounts to a partnership ; a vital union, like that of the grass and potatoes. Hurrish belonged to this elementary and elemental type. If you had offered him twice the acreage of the best grass lands in Meath or Kildare, in exchange for his naked rock, I doubt if he would

have been even tempted to close with it. He was a sentimentalist—though he had never heard the word; and the ground which he had been born on—that hard, thankless, rock-bound ground—was the object of his sentimental worship.

As he walked home now along the rocky zigzag track which led to his cabin, he was thinking very anxiously over Maurice's piece of information about the Gortnacoppin farm. It was a very serious matter. Mat Brady was quite bad enough and troublesome enough where he was—witness to-day, when he had so nearly succeeded in wreaking his spite upon poor Lep, not to speak of those tumbling rocks, which Hurrish began now to suspect of having had some human agency behind them. How would it be when he held land which actually “marched” with Hurrish's own?—when at all hours of the day and night he would be in a position to wreak his spite and malice upon his unfortunate neighbours? Even this was not the end of the trouble he foresaw. Strong daring

man as he was, there were points on which Hurrish, it must be confessed, was an unmitigated coward—a moral one. He had an awe, not unmixed with secret dislike, for that unwritten law under which he, like every one else in the neighbourhood, lay bound and fettered; he had also a long-standing awe of his mother, and the two points showed a good deal of electrical affinity. If Brady was allowed to take this farm, he had a prevision that the results would be decidedly serious. From all that had taken place lately, and from the excited state of feeling in the neighbourhood, he felt sure that he would not be allowed to do so peaceably. He was detested, and was just the sort of man to be made an example of, since no foolish qualms of pity were likely, in his case, to arise to mar the absolute righteousness of the deed.

Now Hurrish, as already explained, had a dislike to murder in the abstract. He had a feeling, too, that if Mat Brady *was* made away with, the crime or the suspicion

of it would certainly be laid at the door of his own cabin—nay, might be laid there not entirely without reason. His mother would assuredly know all about it, and would stir him up by every means in her power to assist—indirectly if not directly. Nay, he knew by bitter experience that it was not by any means impossible that he might be harassed into something like a passive participation in it,—a result which he honestly deprecated beforehand. Was there no way of stopping Brady from taking the farm?—that was the problem which he turned over and over all the way home. It was a very difficult one to solve,—the man's brutal courage, no less than his brutal pigheadedness, making it almost impossible to hit upon any hopeful means of coercing him. At last an idea struck him. It was not very promising, perhaps; still, under the circumstances, it seemed worth trying. He resolved to put it to the test the very next day.

CHAPTER VI.

MR O'BRIEN OF DONORE.

IF the cliffs of Clare are stern and terrible, its lakes are seductive and bewitching beyond words—gems whose beauty steals into the heart like love or sunbeams. Elsewhere the trees, wherever they once grew, have been swept away bodily from the face of the earth, a few stunted hollies, an occasional blighted thorn, the only exception. Around the lakes, on the other hand, and along the streams which feed them, there still springs up year by year a goodly growth,—oak and birch, holly and mountain-ash,—fighting a desperate, but upon the whole a successful, battle against the ever-marauding sheep and goats which prey upon them, and tempt the sympathetic

looker-on to sigh for the fine old gristly Irish wolf, which — historically speaking till the other day—kept those woolly marauders at home by the terrors of his fang.

Donore Lough is long and narrow, brown and clear ; with its tributary streams it helps to form the boundary of two very distinct districts. Northward extends the barren mountain limestone district of Burren, the horizontal rocks of which come up to the very edge of the lake. Southward the grass-covered sandstones and coal-measures of Southern Clare begin, sweeping away in a succession of irregular undulations, now higher, now lower, until their farther course is cut short by the waters of the Shannon. The geology of a district matters, generally speaking, very little, save to the geologist. Eye and foot alike pass from one to the other without a suspicion of any change. Here, however, it is not so. The two formations stand face to face,—foes met in battle array, whose hostility may be read in every ridge, and knoll, and scarped hillside,

the very wayside flower of the one disappearing often, as if by enchantment, when we pass to the other.

All the country visible from the shores of Donore Lough, limestones, sandstones, and coal-measures alike, belongs to Major or—to drop the now generally disused military title—Mr O'Brien. It has never been a very profitable property, and of late years it has produced hardly any margin at all. Not enough to keep up that big ugly house you may see rising with an air of ungainly pretension out of the trees to the south of the lake; hardly enough to pay for yonder posse of workmen, shouldering their spades and shovels, and marching off to their homes with the comfortable consciousness of having done about as little work in return for a day's wage as any conscientiously painstaking body of men in the three kingdoms.

Mr O'Brien was standing at the lake edge and looking about him as he had done every evening of his life for the last sixteen years. The dark blue rippling water was washing

the stones to whiteness at his feet ; the young trees — nearly in full leaf — feathered down almost on to its surface. Upon the other side of the lake lay a long stretch of blue-grey road, along which a small donkey-cart was coming towards him at the rate of perhaps a quarter of a mile an hour. Facing it upon the same road he could see a party of constabulary just breasting the brow of the hill, the reddish rays of the setting sun catching upon the barrels of their guns and the hilts of their side-arms. Fine soldierly fellows they were too, pleasant to see in their smart dark uniforms, stepping well together, tall, erect, well disciplined. Handy, well-disposed fellows moreover, as Mr O'Brien knew, for they were part of his own bodyguard, coming down from the newly-erected iron barracks on the top of the Gortnacoppin ridge. Their merits were not apparently what chiefly engaged his attention at that moment. His brow contracted, his whole face changed, and he turned away from the sight with a groan of unmitigated disgust.

Poor Major Pierce ! Sixteen years had passed since he had returned to the home of his fathers, with a heart full and brains primed for its regeneration. They were not bad brains either, if not perhaps precisely the sort best suited for the work that they had undertaken. Clare, with its wild neglected hillsides ; its lakes set like bright blue eyes in old and wrinkled faces ; its tracts of naked rocks ; its sweet rich snatches of pasture ; its kindly, ragged, shiftless people ; its tales of the fighting O'Briens ; its vast cliffs and matchless breadths of sea and sky—that home air which a man never breathes save at one spot in this whole wide world,—all this had been very dear to him, and, in spite of all that had come and gone, it was dear to him in a sense still.

And yet what a failure ! What a failure ! Here he was, after those sixteen years had passed and gone, about the best hated man between Blackhead and the mouth of the Shannon. A man, the news of whose death would, as he himself well knew, awaken

rejoicing bonfires from one end of his own property to the other ! A man who was strictly forbidden to sit beside an open window, or to go abroad upon his own fields without a tame turnkey at his heels ! Poor Pierce O'Brien ! No wonder the streaks of grey lay so thickly around his forehead ; no wonder his wife and daughter preferred Brighton or Bournemouth to Clare ; no wonder that every post brought volumes of entreaties that he would leave that horrible, wicked, treacherous country, and come where he could live in peace and safety. Still less wonder, perhaps—being the sort of man he was—that he should set his teeth doggedly, and swear that, come what might, they should neither drive nor cajole him out of the country. Castle Donore of Clare was the proper place for an O'Brien of Castle Donore, and they might rob him there, or shoot him there at once and have done with it, but they should never have it to say that they had made him run away of his own accord.

His beard—two or three shades greyer

than his hair—had grown longer and rather dishevelled since his womenkind had departed and had taken the conventionalities of life with them. Yet, in spite of this, and of a slight stoop which he had lately acquired, he looked a soldier still every inch. A close - cropped head, rather hollow above the temples, and rather high at the top, where the hair still grew thickly ; good, well-opened blue eyes, not large but kindly ; a face which spoke of geniality and obstinacy, of amiability and irascibility—a very Irish face, too, though it was rather difficult to say wherein the distinctive Hibernianism consisted. The geniality and amiability, alas ! were fast losing ground. Cares, worries, loneliness, were doing their work, the friendly blue eyes were fast becoming a mere nucleus of concentric wrinkles, and the hospitable genial mouth acquiring a confirmed droop at the corners.

Poor Major Pierce ! Poor tenants ! Shall we—ought we not perhaps in fairness—add poor “ Government ” that had to interpose be-

tween the two? What a hopeless dead-lock it all was! What a dismal concatenation of blunders, misrepresentations, prejudices—prejudices from above, and prejudices from below—prejudices which would have been laughable but that they were so deplorably tragic! In the eyes of the people about Donore—all, that is, but a few personal retainers—this poor, good-natured, well-meaning, utterly puzzled and half heart-broken man appeared in the light of an ogre,—a sort of blood-sucking, land-grabbing, body-and-soul-destroying monster—who devoured widows' substances, and snatched the bread from the starving lips of orphans! One would laugh, but that one is really more than half tempted to cry—if crying, that is to say, would do any good. Major Pierce used to laugh himself, but latterly he had left off doing so. There comes a point in even the most ridiculous misfortunes, where the humour ceases to be entertaining—at any rate to the victim.

He walked on along the edge, under a

wistful rose-tinted sky. The wind was going down with the sun, and the stillness spreading. There was a low stone parapet at this part, with a few rotting stakes at intervals, to one of which an old black punt was attached. A little farther on a stream fell over some rocks, and the scent of the mosses and water-weeds rose penetratingly.

How still it all was ! how serene ! how filled with breathing from the very inmost soul of peace ! Everything that was grim in the day-time, was mellowed now to peace and beauty. The grey terraced hills of the Burren shone with a pale spectral glow, which lingered upon their chiselled sides, as upon the bastions of half-dismantled fortresses. The same glow floated over the lake, which was golden in one part, and transparent black in another ; the rushes and little upstanding water-weeds springing up, each in separate beauty, against this agate setting. Hardly a sound. Only a little lisp of water, only a distant leisurely rumbling, only a far-off cry of hurrying sea-birds. The ascetic dreamy

beauty seemed endowed with a voice that was simply itself made audible.

The poor owner of these serene possessions was hardly as atuned as he should have been to their enjoyment! There was nothing, you see, dreamily peaceful in the outlook which lay before him! Only worries and more worries—only the bitterness of a mind which sees that everything it has set itself upon is going contrariwise; only a growing dogged determination to fight a losing battle, but to fight it out to the bitter end.

He turned away from the lake and the peace and the glow, and entered a narrow walk between tall, rather neglected-looking trees, which led past the gate of a disused churchyard, beyond which stood a ruined church, deep on every side with nettles, and beyond which, again, could be seen the tangled opening of the wood.

It was quite dusk here, and the shadows under the trees were almost black. It was a little startling, therefore, as he approached the middle of the walk, to see a figure—tall

broad-shouldered, evidently frieze-coated—waiting for him in one of the larger of those patches of shadow, and close to the gate of the disused churchyard.

A bolder man than Pierce O'Brien, I may say, never breathed or fought. He utterly detested this protection forced upon him by a paternal Government, and expended a good deal of rather misplaced ingenuity in evading it whenever circumstances rendered such evasion possible. Again and again had he obliged those unfortunate myrmidons of the law, the "polis," to waste breath in an excited scurry over hill and dale before they could come up to their charge and take him under their bayoneted protection again. He did not even, for his own part, believe profoundly in this so-much-talked-of peril. If people wanted to shoot him, he had given them no lack of opportunities, and so far they had not availed themselves of them. Still, when you have been told for months past that your life is hardly worth an hour's purchase; that dozens of people are thirsting

to pour your life's blood out upon your own threshold ; when you have not only been assured that your execution has been formally decided upon, but even the gentleman who has undertaken that delicate office has again and again been confidentially named to you,—it stands to reason that a suspicious stranger skulking about your avenue awakens livelier emotions than where you expect no more thrilling visitor than the milkman or the post-boy !

He did not turn back, however,—merely put his hand in his pocket, and produced an ugly sausage-shaped parcel which presently gave forth a significant click.

“ Who is there ? ” he inquired.

“ 'Tis me, your anner—Hurrish O'Brien,” came from the depths of the ominous shadow.

“ Mr O'Brien gave a laugh—rather an angry one—and put his parcel back into his pocket again.

“ And what the devil, Hurrish O'Brien, do you mean by hiding in the trees like that ? ” he inquired, irritably.

“I was waitin’ to have a private word with yer anner, Meejar,”—and slowly, like some unusually substantial ghost, Hurrish emerged from the deep blackness into the comparative illumination of the tangled pathway.

“Private word? What do you want a private word about, eh?”

“I’ll tell yer anner that when we’re to our two selves,” was the cautious reply.

Mr O’Brien groaned. “More worries, I suppose! Hang me, if one is left in peace two days consecutively, it is a wonder! Well, come in here. We shall be quiet enough, Lord knows, there!”

He turned, and led the way into the churchyard, through a rickety iron gate, which gave out a discordant croak as if in protestation. A big horse-chestnut tree, one mass of flower to the very summit, was lifting its crimson-tipped spikes above a pair of stunted yews, spreading thick black arms over the nettles. Skulls and cross-bones—cheerful and apparently inevitable embellishments of an Irish churchyard—lay about

in corners, so greened over and harmonised, however, by mosses and lichens, that it would have taken a somewhat anatomical eye to have recognised them for what they were.

“Now then, Hurrish, what is it you want? Be quick, man; I’ve no time to lose.”

The tone was irritable, yet Major Pierce was not ill-tempered, nor even, as a rule, wanting in courtesy to those about him. Some allowance must be made for him. When everything that a man sees and hears is about as pleasant as a handful of sand upon a newly-made wound, it is scarcely to be wondered at if his tone grows querulous, and his style of conversation unconciliatory.

Hurrish was not to be hurried. There was a sense of solemnity to him in his mission.

“Furst an’ foremoust, I want to pay yer anner the bit of rint,”—and he mysteriously produced a large canvas bag, which emitted a chinky sound.

Mr O’Brien glanced at it suspiciously.

“No reduction,—you understand that,

Hurrish?" he said, sharply. "Reduction! God bless my soul!" the poor man burst out, stung by the mere mention of that familiar grievance—"do you know that it is forty-five years since a single rent upon the property has been raised? Do you know how often I've been advised to put another twenty-five per cent upon every man jack of you all round, and have always refused?—upon principle, mind you—upon principle. Do you know that I am asked now to take thirty per cent reduction, the same that that fellow Maclellan who bought the Tullaloe property only four years ago, and whose rents have been raised twice since, has given? Do you know that, I ask you, Hurrish?"

"I do, yer anner."

"Very well, then I hope *you* won't begin talking about a reduction, because I won't listen to it, so there's an end of it."

For all answer, Hurrish poured out the contents of the bag upon a flat tombstone, and began sorting the coins into little heaps.

"Yer anner can count. 'Tis the same as iver," he said, in a tone of expostulation.

Mr O'Brien felt a touch of vexation, perhaps even of self-reproach. He was a generous man by nature, much more addicted to giving than to taking, if circumstances had only admitted of the possibility of such a luxury. It was the principle he fought for, not the dirty pounds and shillings. He liked Hurrish, and under ordinary circumstances would have scorned to drive a bargain with him. It was the word "reduction" that stunk in his nostrils, and fired his pride. It was the shibboleth for the moment of the whole battlefield.

"Oh, if you say so, no doubt it's all right, Hurrish," he said, as he gathered the money up, and shovelled it loosely into his pocket. "I can count it presently, and give you a receipt. But why do you want to pay me now, instead of waiting until the 20th?"

Hurrish, in lieu of reply, stuck his fingers into a small hole in the wall near which they were standing, and dislodged a loose

stone, which fell with a dull thud amongst the nettles. "I thought I'd as lief pay yer anner to-day," he said stolidly.

Mr O'Brien asked no more. He knew better than to push the matter further. To do so would have been to tempt the door of that inexhaustible cavern of lies which is supposed to yawn around every Irish proprietor. Hurrish had a good reputation in this particular, it is true, but no man should be tempted beyond what he is able to bear.

"Thar's another matter I was wantin' to spake to yer anner 'bout." Hurrish paused and looked suspiciously round the churchyard, as if expecting to detect some unseen eavesdropper, his eye resting finally upon the skulls — safe and silent witnesses of humanity. "For God's sake, don't let Mat Brady have Maloney's farm!" he whispered, when he had apparently satisfied himself on this point.

"Why not?" Mr O'Brien inquired sharply.

"Becase, yer anner—becase—there'll be bad wark—the divil's *own* bad wark—so

sure as iver he does," was the emphatic reply.

Mr O'Brien uttered an angry expostulation, and walked the length of the short path leading to the gate, then turned back.

"How the deuce am I to help it, I should like to know?" he inquired, testily. If any one else makes me an offer for the farm, I'm perfectly willing—if he is a solvent man, that is—to give him the preference. No one can have a worse opinion of that Brady fellow than I have myself—ill-conditioned sot! Still he has money—he is not likely to be short at rent-day; and I tell you plainly, Hurrish, I can't afford to be out of pocket another farm. Why, God bless my soul, man, I might just as well have let the Maloneys remain in it if I am not to get another tenant!"

"An' that's true, yer anner."

Mr O'Brien did not seem particularly pleased with this ready assent. He turned away with an angry "Pish," and walked back to the gate.

"Make me an offer for it yourself, if it comes to that, Hurrish," he said, when he had returned. "You're a decent, sober man, and it would throw the two farms into one, and make a good thing of it. Come, is that what you have been driving at? If so, speak up."

But Hurrish shook his head.

"Thank yer anner, I wasn't thinkin' ov meself," he answered, slowly. "I cudn't take the farm, not if 't was iver so. I've 'nough land as 't is."

"That means you're afraid," the other retorted, hotly. "You've got your orders, and daren't disobey. Eh?"

Hurrish made no answer.

"It is inconceivable to me how respectable, well-disposed men like yourself can let themselves be made the cat's-paw of such a pack of scheming, good-for-nothing rascals!" Mr O'Brien went on with increased irritation—"fellows without a penny to lose, who would throw you over like an old shoe the instant you had served their turn! Come, pluck up a little spirit, man, and defy them! You

usen't to be a coward. Look at me ! They've been threatening death and destruction to me for the last two years, and I don't see that I'm particularly the worse for it."

Hurrish fixed his eyes where he was bidden, not without a discernible touch of pity, then shook his head again.

"Now, Meejar, sorr, sure don't ye know there's things a man can do, an' there's things he can't," he said, oracularly.

The Major this time was silent. He knew it well enough. His position and Hurrish's were not so utterly unlike but what a certain amount of fellow-feeling was inevitable. The reflection did not tend to make him any better contented.

"Very well, Brady has the farm," he said, curtly. "I shall let him know to-morrow."

Hurrish's face was by this time invisible, but his attitude was expressive. He stood still in the darkness, a formidable figure—big, black, and silently expostulatory.

Mr O'Brien experienced that uneasy sen-

sation which we all know, even on less weighty occasions, when we reject some piece of advice, backed by shadowy, but none the less ominous, threats.

“It’s a new thing for you to be so anxious upon Mat Brady’s account,” he said, irritably, as he turned and left the churchyard, Hurrish accompanying him a few yards behind. “How long have you and he been such friends, I should like to know?”

“I don’t care a thawneen, no nor th’ half ov a thawneen, what comes t’ him,” Hurrish answered, gloomily. “’Taint that I’m unaisy ’bout, anyway.”

They were back on the walk now, and passing under the trees, through which a few white threads of light stole casually. When they reached the more open portion, Hurrish halted.

“I’ll be wishin’ yer anner good night, I’m thinkin’,” he said, in his deep mellifluous brogue, rendered deeper than usual by his desire not to be overheard.

“Good night to you, Hurrish. Sorry I

couldn't oblige you. You'll see me up at your house before very long."

"Thank yer anner. Good night, an' God save yer anner!"

When he went back to the house, Mr O'Brien was met by his old man-servant, who told him that the sub-inspector of police from Doocaher had called, and was waiting in the dining-room to speak to him.

Sub-inspector Higgins was a good-looking young gentleman of twenty- six or seven, whose dearest wish and dream of ambition had been to go into the army. This his father, a well-to-do London tradesman, had declined to allow of, but, as a compromise, had permitted his son to try for a commission in the Irish Constabulary, shrewdly suspecting that very little practical experience would suffice to cure him of any desire to continue wearing *that* uniform, while for any other it would by that time be too late. He was not, perhaps, what by very stern critics would be called quite a gentleman. Still, he was a harmless, well-meaning young fel-

low enough, and, under ordinary circumstances, Mr O'Brien would have been perfectly willing to show him every possible civility. Unfortunately, in one of their first interviews the young man had exhibited some of the importance of the newly-made jack-in-office, which the elder one had not unnaturally been unable to stomach. As a magistrate, the police and the police-officers were theoretically under his own and his brother magistrate's orders. Practically, however, it was not so. The head-inspector and stipendiary magistrate, being the two officials directly responsible to Government, were the two in whom all real power was vested, the others being both actually and visibly ciphers—not one of the least vexatious of the many minor vexations of the times.

“Good evening, Mr Higgins,” he said, as he entered the room and shook hands with his guest. “A fine evening. You wanted to see me about something, the servant said. Sit down. Take this arm-chair.”

“Yes, Mr O'Brien. I—ar—” the young

man had a very distinguished halt in his delivery—"I—ar—called to speak to you about—ar—yourself."

"About myself!" Mr O'Brien's forehead and eyebrows contracted suddenly. "Indeed! I am sorry that you should be troubled about so unimportant a subject. What is it?"

"Well, the fact is, Sergeant Flynn has been complaining to me—complaining rather seriously, Mr O'Brien. He tells me that he finds it absolutely impossible to be answerable for your safety if you persist in declining the escort which has been provided for you by the—ar—Government. Now I put it to you, sir, as a—ar—former officer, is it fair to subject those unfortunate men to the certainty of a reprimand, and the—ar—probability of dismissal, for a negligence which can scarcely, under the circumstances, be considered their—ar—fault?"

Mr Higgins had rehearsed this little address, and was not ill pleased with its effect.

Upon Mr O'Brien the effect was exactly that of an application of mustard to a very sore spot. Three things especially offended him. First, the outrageous fact of a mere tenth-rate Government whipper-snapper like this young Higgins being in a position to lecture him—Pierce O'Brien of Donore—upon any subject whatsoever. Secondly, the undeniable fact that he *had* to some extent laid himself open to such an expostulation by his persistent evasion of his paternally provided protectors. Thirdly, the tone, air, and general delivery of the young man himself, which rendered that intolerable which under no circumstances would have been particularly palatable. If Mr Higgins had been an underbred and somewhat consequential young Irishman, the offence, though quite bad enough, would have been infinitely less ; but being, unfortunately, a consequential and somewhat underbred young Englishman, the tone and accent with which the reproof was conveyed became part of the offence, and doubled its enormity. He endeavoured, however,

to reply without visibly at least losing his temper.

“I am sorry to have to disagree with you, Mr Higgins; at the same time, I think you will admit that I am at least as good a judge of what is or is not necessary as you, with your very limited experience, can pretend to be,” he said, quietly. “As you are probably aware, a considerable time has elapsed since any agrarian crime has been committed in this neighbourhood, and that being the case, if I—a native of the district—consider that the time has also come when the inconvenience of a police escort may be dispensed with, I really think that is all that need concern any one, and so I shall make it my business to inform the Government.”

Mr Higgins in his turn was not a little nettled by this reply. There was a touch of *hauteur*, particularly in the conclusion of it, which seemed to relegate him from the position of the full-blown official, to that of the mere irresponsible under-strapper—naturally offensive to a young man whose

native self-importance has latterly been fed with the sense of authority.

“ My acquaintance with Ireland is, as you say, rather—ar—limited,” he said, with a somewhat unsuccessful air of indifference. “ Under present circumstances I should hardly be likely to select it as a place to come to for *pla-asure*, I must say. How much worse it is capable of being I don’t pretend therefore to—ar—know ; all I can say is, that it appears to me at present to be in a perfectly awful condition. ’Pon my word and honour, perfectly awful.”

He really did *not* say “ hawful,” but the Cockney inflexion was none the less perceptible.

Major Pierce O’Brien’s temper, already pretty well tried by the events of the evening, fairly boiled over.

“ Then all *I* can say, Mr Higgins, is, that I wonder you ever thought of coming to such an awful country.” The “ awful ” was again a perceptible Cockney awful. “ As a native of that country, I am bound of course to

express my gratitude. At the same time, I think you have really carried condescension far enough, and might now, without loss of dignity, devote your evidently brilliant talents to some more congenial sphere of action. As regards my poor safety, allow me to suggest, with all due deference to your superior judgment, that that is a matter which entirely and exclusively concerns *myself*. If I prefer to run such risks as I may be exposed to in this *hateful* country"—there was no disguise or hesitation about the *h* now,—"rather than have the annoyance which seems to be inseparable from the present system of police protection, I have yet to learn that I am not at liberty to do so. I am exceedingly sorry that you should have had the trouble of coming here this evening upon so wholly unnecessary an errand. Mat, show Mr Higgins 'out.'"

Mr Higgins was shown out, and retreated with as much dignity as was compatible with the somewhat hasty nature of his exit. As he strode up the carriage road under the

interlocking branches of laurel, his mind was very nearly worked up to the point of sending in his resignation. To have to live in an odious climate, to put up with the most villanously uncomfortable quarters, and to be called upon at any moment to perform the most unpleasant offices,—all this was surely bad enough. To be snubbed and insulted into the bargain, merely because you discharged an evident duty, was more than self-respecting flesh and blood could be expected to bear !

His host meanwhile remained behind, boiling over with unabated wrath. Oddly enough, it was the slight to the country which chiefly infuriated him ! “D——d Cockney whipper-snapper ! coming and ventilating his twopenny-halfpenny insolence in that fashion !” he ejaculated. Yet this poor much-abused Mr Higgins had said nothing surely half or quarter as bad as he, Pierce O’Brien, had said a hundred thousand times over ? True ; but then he was a stranger, and that, it must be owned, made all the difference.

The sense of country is a very odd possession, and in no part of the world is it odder than in Ireland. Soldier, landlord, Protestant, very Tory of Tories as he was, Pierce O'Brien was at heart as out-and-out an Irishman—nay, in a literal sense of the word, a Nationalist—as any frieze-coated Hurrish of them all. He was furious with himself that he had not, while he was about it, given poor Mr Sub-inspector Higgins even a yet more emphatic piece of his mind. “D——d Cockney puppy! But I’ll make him smart for his insolence! I’ll report him, sure as my name is Pierce O’Brien! To come here and—and—and——” So he fumed to himself, there being no one else, unfortunately, to fume to.

His wrath, however, did not last long. It evaporated almost as quickly as it had arisen, and settled down into a sort of moody discontent, the normal condition of his mind of late. After a while he began even to reproach himself, not for having lost his temper, but for having done so under his own

roof; letting the other leave Donore in a fashion and under circumstances which could hardly be called hospitable; Donore! the very symbol formerly in Clare for hospitality! He went back to the empty dining-room, which he had left in the first exuberance of his anger, lit a candle, and walked round the gloomy desolate walls, looking at one thing after another, he hardly knew why. Then — setting the candle down upon the mantelpiece—he stood with his back to the empty fireplace, gazing in front of him, his forehead puckered up into a fretwork of weary wrinkles. The old man-servant, who had been to the hall-door, returned, and started violently when he saw his master standing thus, with a candle behind him and the windows unshuttered, inviting—positively inviting—a chance shot. Mr O'Brien stood still and watched, with a mixture of vexation and pity, as the old fellow went tremblingly round the windows, carefully shuttering and barring each in succession, until darkness, pure and unrelieved, had replaced the warm

widely diffused summer twilight. It struck him that it was pretty much what was happening to his own life !

“Poor old beggar ! evidently he too considers that I require protection as long as I remain in this ‘hateful’ country,” he said to himself grimly, as he took up the candle again and went to wash his hands, preparatory to sitting down to a solitary dinner.

CHAPTER VII.

MAURICE IS HURT BY ALLEY'S INGRATITUDE.

THE appointed Wednesday came, and Maurice Brady duly appeared at Hurrish O'Brien's cabin, — "herself" (as the mistress of a house is always called in Ireland) being safe away at Donologue, where she had gone in the ass-cart with the spring chickens. Those poor spring chickens! How they clucked, and cackled, and fluttered their hapless wings before being deposited at the bottom of that cart! It was a long way for Maurice Brady to come, even with a lift part of the way on the mail-car: he was in love, however—more in love, perhaps, than he was himself aware—and the obstacles recently set in the path of his passion had tended

to make him more consciously determined to persevere with it than he had felt previously,—a sensation experienced by other lovers before him.

Alley's beauty was certainly enough to tempt any young man to obstinacy, especially one with ideas above the standard of his contemporaries, and not therefore to be affected by any want of appreciation upon their part. It was odd how little the girl seemed to realise it herself. It was as if the very beginnings of vanity had never been born in her. She was too humble-minded, dreamy, and nun-like, for that sort of eager self-admiration which flows spontaneously through so many young girls' veins, and of which love itself, when it comes, is often only the completion. It had been little fed by admiration either. From the bold admiring looks of passing strangers she shrank with the instinctive modesty both of her race and her own instincts; and of the little world around her, there were only two—Hurrish and Maurice Brady—

who had ever even hinted to her that she was handsome. There are no doubt born nuns, just as there are born actors, or born violinists, and the type is more often to be met with amongst the pious peasant girls of the south and west of Ireland, than perhaps in any other class or country in the world. Alley had an elder sister who was a nun in Galway, and until Maurice had asked her to marry him, she had often thought that she would like to join her, and to be one too. Even as it was, she sometimes thought with a wistful lingering regret of the life. It was so safe ! Poor Alley's being one of those timorously sensitive natures to which the horizon of fear will always be far, far wider than that of hope.

She was simple-minded and ignorant beyond the dreams of even the most simple-minded and the most ignorant in more sophisticated regions. She could read, but except her national school lesson-books and a few penny lives of the saints, she had hardly

read, or wished to read, a line ; as to newspapers, she would not have glanced at one for the world. She was exceedingly devout, and one of the bitterest trials of her life was the impediments which old Bridget, with specially vindictive malice, was fond of putting in the way of her getting to mass upon a Sunday morning. Food and the shelter of a home she had from Hurrish, but not a single possession that she could call her own in the world. The ordinary incitement, therefore, to vanity of fine, or even what an English or Scotch peasant would call decent clothes, she had never had ; and except that her red flannel petticoat was never ragged, and the coarse cotton bodices worn with it scrupulously washed by herself, no beggar-girl upon the high-road could have been more miserably ill-clad. This, however, she cared little about. She was inured to hardship. That native asceticism, too, which, under other circumstances, would have lent itself easily to the imposed severities of any religious order, helped her per-

haps to bear the hardships of her present lot. She did not think about it, of course, in that light, but it went towards making them seem not only inevitable, but natural—a very different thing.

When Maurice arrived, she was busily cleaning the cabin, driving the dust before her through the open door, to the surprise and evident indignation of an elderly hen—the anxious mother of a large family—who, tired with strolling over the rocks into the crevices of which her brood were inconveniently given to dropping, had returned to the seclusion of the fireside, only to find it in this state of revolution.

Alley, as it happened, had a turn for cleanliness, though it was not often that she got a chance of indulging her tastes in that direction, her poor little attempts at orderliness being promptly nipped in the bud by old Bridget, who—pronounced democrat as she was in other respects—was a very conservative of conservatives as regards household arrangements, denouncing all variation

from the traditional methods as "thrash" and "thricks," not to be countenanced for a moment by people who respected themselves or the ways of their forefathers.

Young Brady found himself a three-legged stool, and, placing it in the doorway, sat down, his legs clad in well-fitting tweed trousers, stretched out with an air of condescension across the threshold. Little Katty, the only child at home, had been bribed to keep quiet during the sweeping by the temporary loan of Alley's rosary—the one portable piece of property which the poor girl possessed—and was sitting perched upon the low wall which surrounded the little enclosure, running the red and white beads through her fat baby fingers with all the self-importance and apparent unction of some stout lady abbess.

Everything in and about the house—even the chickens and the weeds upon the roof—seemed rejoicing in the absence of the reigning tyrant. There was a sense of peace and comfort, even a vague touch of beauty, about

the little homestead to-day, which was more due perhaps to the lovely cloud-dotted sky and warm comforting glance of the sun than to anything more directly inherent to itself. Over the fields of rock around, the larks were singing jubilantly, one now and then dropping with a sudden hush into some gaping fissure, where, for lack of better lodgment, it had made its nest, and was rearing a brood of callow choristers. A warm but boisterous and self-important little breeze whisked round the house, astonished apparently to find anything standing against it. It sent the dust that Alley had swept outside whirling about in little fantastic curves and spirals, finally settling into a thick grey drift in one of the corners. The old hen had by this time returned, and was establishing herself and family, with much chuckling volubility, in the bottom of a broken chair, which had been half filled with straw for their especial convenience.

Marvellous the amount of rubbish of one sort and another accumulated within the

compass of that one small room ! Odds and ends of all sorts, domestic, agricultural, piscatorial ;—a broken harrow, past its work, reared against the wall ; odd boots of Hurish's, still coated thickly with mud ; fishing tackle, and bits of oars ; pans of milk which had been " set " for butter, but out of which the cats and children were perpetually taking surreptitious sips. Everything that any member of the family had ever used in their whole lives was probably to be found represented in some corner or other. No one, however, except Alley, ever thought that any of these things would be better put away into receptacles of their own. Even Maurice Brady—fastidious young man as he was in some respects—regarded it all as perfectly natural, and was not in the least offended or disconcerted by the utterly inconceivable squalor of the whole arrangement.

This indifference to squalor—rather the admission of it—is not certainly the pleasantest bit of duty which falls to the lot of the modest chronicler of peasant Ireland. Since it now

and then has to be faced, however, it is as well perhaps to do so steadily and unshrinkingly, as we confront any of the other hundred thousand not particularly pleasant facts of life. Cleanliness and purity are words which admit, too, of more than one meaning, it must be remembered, and some of those meanings are not necessarily compatible with well-scoured floors and furniture gleaming with hand-polish,—meanings which might even not a little surprise those uncivilised ones to whom the floor seems a far handier receptacle for rubbish than a dust-bin, and who have no squeamish prejudices against the indoor society of ducks, or a cheerful, if vociferous, nursery of young pigs. When all is said, however, we must leave the ill to work its own cure. National idiosyncrasies are hard things to mend, and exceedingly awkward ones to meddle with. They yield, if they yield at all, very slowly — often almost imperceptibly. “We cannot measure worlds by rule, or put a continent to school,” sings a poet

of to-day; and perhaps even one small island may fairly, therefore, decline to be lessoned save by the great head-schoolmaster—Time.

Maurice Brady was certainly not thinking of national failings at that moment, nor was he even thinking of his own budding ambition,—of the days when he, too, would stand amongst his fellows in the halls of Westminster, and fling the scornful defiance of an Irish patriot in the very teeth of the foreign tyrant. He was thinking of a much prettier subject,—namely, of Ally Sheehan's arms. She had given up her sweeping upon his appearance, and had taken up a half-knitted blue stocking, destined for Hurrish, the needles of which she was deftly moving to and fro in her small slight hands. They were unusually delicately shaped hands, though as brown almost as if dipped in walnut juice. Higher up, however, where her faded cotton sleeve had been pushed for the convenience of sweeping, a space of arm immediately below the elbow—a space not usually exposed to the sun and

wind—was left visible, and no white rose-bud petal could well have boasted a prettier colour. The young man fixed his eyes upon it with an air of approval.

“Some of these days see if I don’t bring you a dress, a real silk one, Alley,” he said, in a tone of lordly decision,—“a light green, perhaps, or maybe one of those fashionable reds. Dress you as you should be dressed, and you’d take the shine out of half the ladies that come to Miltown - Malbay, or Kilkee either, that you would!”

Alley blushed a little and held her head down, pleased, but shy. Though he was her lover, Maurice was not usually prodigal of compliments.

“An’ what ud I do ’t all in a silk dress, Morry, dear,” she said in her gentle sing-song western tones, so infinitely pleasanter to listen to than the hideous gutturals of the opposite side of the island.

“Do?” Maurice grew quite excited at the thought. “Begad, and there’s plenty of things you’d do! Look like a lady, born

and bred,—as I mean *my* wife to look, I can tell you; wear shoes and stockings every day of your life,—the best to be had,—and gloves too, and a hat or bonnet, with a veil, of course, when you went out in the sun. And you'd have a satin parasol,—a white one with a proper lining, and lace that deep"—Maurice's haberdashery experience lent, it will be observed, a certain amount of practical detail to his imagination—"and your dress down to the ground, and humped up so"—with a little necessary dramatic explanation—"for every lady, and plenty that's not ladies at all, has it so; and you'd walk along beside of me, picking your steps carefully and pointing your toes so, and when the fellars looked at you admiring like—as dozens would—you'd just look over their heads, or to 'one side, so—as much as to say that you wasn't aware they were in it at all!"

Alley burst into a peal of laughter—pretty, silvery, ringing laughter—which rang through the stony surroundings of the cabin, and

made little Katty look up at her playfellow with an air of momentary astonishment on her rosy, dusty little face.

“Arrah, Morry, dear, ’t isn’t me, ’t all ’t all, ’tw’d be thin,” she said; “’tis some gran’ lady ye’ve seen at Miltown yer thinkin’ ov! Sure, how ud *I* know how to wear a veil, or to put me toes so. ’Tis laughin’ at me y’ar!”

“Not at all, Alley.” Maurice’s expression showed that he was in fact perfectly serious. “You don’t understand me, that’s all!” (He had perceived that in the enthusiasm of his last speech he had allowed his rhetoric to run into somewhat native variations, and was therefore additionally watchful now.) “Of course you couldn’t be expected to learn all these things *at once*,” he went on condescendingly, “but *I* should be there and able to train you, for I’ve watched how ladies behave often and often, and thought to myself,—‘Alley Sheehan could give you all a start, and beat you easy if she had her rights!’ Isn’t that why I’m so *fond* of

you?" he continued, in an explanatory tone. "Sure, if 'twas money, or that sort of thing I was thinking of, 'twouldn't be yourself I'd look at, when you haven't a ha'porth—I mean a pennyworth—good or bad in the world, as you know very right well yourself."

This time Alley did not laugh. She sighed instead, and let the stocking slide down upon her lap.

"But you've looks, and that's better," her lover went on convincingly. "I'd rather have ye as you are, than I'd have a common-looking girl with her pockets full of gold—and 't isn't many young fellars in the country would say that!" he added, with not unjustifiable self-exultation. "I'll be earning me two pounds a-week before very long, and more than that, too, in another way,—I'd tell you how, only that you wouldn't understand me,—and then I'll come or send for you, Alley, and marry you right off; and we'll live in Limerick, or Dublin itself maybe, and never come nigh these stupid old racks again, or be bothered with any of

the people, for 'tis sick and tired to death of the sight of them I am !”

But Alley was not at all prepared for so heroic a measure of transplantation. On the contrary, a pang of dismay, for which she could hardly herself account, shot through her at the bare suggestion.

“Is it lave entoirely ? Is it not see Hurrish 't all 't all ? Och, Morry, sure I cudn't ! 'Tud break me heart out an' out !” she exclaimed, with sudden panic.

Maurice Brady's brow clouded immediately. His expression, which had hitherto been all that was complacently kind and protective, grew suddenly hard and stern.

“That's a nice hearing for me, I must say !” he exclaimed, angrily. “To be told you're that set upon Hurrish, that you wouldn't go away from where you're so badly treated—not when it's to go along with *me* ! 'Tis only what I might have expected, though. Women are all like that. No gratitude or feeling in them at all at all,”—with the air of one deeply versed in the

ways of that perfidious sex. "And *I* that have been thinking of nothing but how soon I could marry you, and get you away from it all, and give you good clothes and mate—meat, I mean—every day, and everything you could possibly want or wish—and all at once to be told that you like your rags and tatters and bits of potato-skin and skilligolee—skim-milk—best! If you hadn't told me so yourself, I never would have *believed* it of you, Alley—never!" he added, in a tone of high moral reprobation.

Poor Alley was all penitence in a moment. Disapprobation from those she cared for was like the withdrawal of sunlight to a daisy,—it caused her to curl up her petals and collapse immediately.

"Sure, Morry, I didn't mane to offind you," she said, in a tone of deprecation, the tears beginning to collect in her violet eyes and to fall upon the stocking in her hands. "I'd go anywhere 't all wid you,—an' why not, iv course? But you see I'm only a poor ignorant colleen, an' I get aisily dashed, not

bein' usted to shtrange people, or understandin' their ways or gran' talk the way you do. Me heart seems jist tied to the things I know—most of them, lasteways," with a recollection of old Bridget, to whom even her gentle heart was not perhaps very warmly tied. "I don't seem able to *think* even of goin' away—not altogether. I'm like thim little yellar shtrokes ye may see round the idges of the say-pools, that go jumpin', an' hoppin', an' dancin', an' pullin' away, as if they was wantin' to be flyin' aff all over the country; an' all the while they niver gits raaly away from the whater, an' I don't suppose they're wantin' to, nayther."

"That's because you have no imagination, Alley," the young man answered promptly. "I'm not *blaming* you for it, mind. "If it isn't born in you, you couldn't have it—not if you paid a hundred teachers to learn you. Now I'm so different. Ever since I was a little bit of a fellar I was always planning and thinking and saying to myself, 'I'll do this, an' I'll do that, when I'm

growed a man.' And I'd lay awake at night planning it all out—how I'd get all the larnin'—learning, I mean—I could, and not mind the botheration of it, becace it would all be wanted, and more too, and I'd make friends with all the shmart young fellars I met, and not be sticking to the old ways—such as Hurrish and the rest of them here 'bout does—but have an eye open to see what was for me own good; for there's a grand time coming entirely for shmart fellars in Ireland, Alley, I tell you that—though 'tis little you understand, nor would, I s'pose, if I was to talk from now till to-morrow."

Poor Alley sighed, and was silent. The gulf of inferiority which separated her from her brilliant lover did indeed seem to her so wide as to be almost impassable. It frightened her, and made her wonder whether he could really wish to marry her. Surely she would be nothing but an encumbrance to him. He ought to marry one of those grand ladies whom he had been describing, who came to Miltown-Malbay or Kilkee for

the bathing season, and who knew by nature how to point their toes and all the rest of those accomplishments which she could never, never, she feared, acquire. She had felt the same thing often before, though seldom, perhaps, quite so acutely. If at that moment he had told her that he had made up his mind to throw her over, I almost suspect that her first feeling would have been one of unconscious relief.

Maurice, too, was silent—lost, perhaps, in a beatific vision of future dignities to be attained to by himself; and in the stillness steps were heard coming towards them—a pair of iron-bound boots striking against the crisp edges of the rocks—and a minute after Hurrish's big frame and broad genial face were seen over the low wall encircling three sides of the cabin.

Katty—who had been getting desperately bored with her plaything—threw down the rosary disdainfully into the dust, and started off in a short scrambling run to meet him, clutching him tightly round the knees before

he could get inside the enclosure, and throwing her whole baby weight against his legs.

Like all big mild men, Hurrish adored his children, and Miss Katty especially ruled over him like a despot.

"Well, Kitteen, ye tormint, an' what d'ye want wid yer da?" he asked admiringly, stooping down and picking her up in his arms. "Will I toss ye away an' be quit ov ye wance an' for all?"—pretending to throw her up on to the roof of the cabin, where a house-leek—emblem of good luck—reigned over a green forest of wild oats and nodding grass. "Luk where ye've thrown poor Alley's bades to, ye bad gurl," he added, stooping and picking them up. "For shame ov yer, Kitteen! 'Tis a big shtick ye want yer dada to cut for ye,—that's what yer after. Well, Morry, me bhoy, how's yerself?"

Young Brady responded with friendly warmth to Hurrish's greeting, and they talked together for a while. He did not care to stay much longer, however, now

that the party was increased, so got up before long, saying that he must be off, as he had a long walk before him.

Hurrish thereupon went into the cabin, and returned with a bottle and a tumbler, which he proceeded to half-fill with unchristened—*i.e.*, unwatered—poteen, explaining, as he did so, that he had got it from Aranmore, where a barrel had lately been landed by a friend of his under the very nose of the Custom-house officers. It was one of Hurrish's idiosyncrasies—the most unaccountable of them to his neighbours—that he rarely drank, and had never, it was said, been known to be drunk in his life, though this statement is so large a demand upon credulity that I rather hesitate to lay it before the reader. Be this as it may, to allow a guest to leave your roof without offering him a glass of anything would have been a high indecorum, not to speak of being the worst luck possible—a consideration which he was the last man in Ireland to disregard.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BREATH OF CELTIC ELOQUENCE.

THE poteen was excellent, and Maurice Brady sipped it with slow enjoyment. He was no more of a drunkard than Hurrish, but he had a native liking for anything that was good of its kind, and—decent wines being unattainable—was necessarily a connoisseur in whisky. He refused another glass, however, and got up, saying that he must be off.

Hurrish proposed to accompany him as far as the turn to Miltown-Malbay, having something to see to, he said, at Tubbamina.

The parting between the lovers was rather cold, though Hurrish discreetly retired to put away the bottle, and remained inside

long enough to have emptied three or four had he been so minded. Maurice was loftily offended, while Alley was in a state of trembling alarm and apprehension, fearing to offend, and yet not knowing how to avoid doing so.

When at last Hurrish came back there was no further delay, and the two men walked off together in the direction of the sea. They did not, however, cross the rocks at the narrowest point, but kept away for some distance to the south, until they came out again upon the edge at another point where the cliffs were higher, and almost vertical. Here, by mutual consent, they paused, and stood for a few minutes looking down at what lay below them.

It was worth looking at ! Not that these were by any means the finest cliffs in Clare,—not to be compared, for instance, to the cliffs of Moher a few miles farther down, which lift their seven hundred and fifty feet of rock perpendicularly above the waves. For all that, it was such a cliff and such a scene as

in any other part of the kingdom would have made the fortune of every fly-owner and innkeeper within a radius of twenty miles. In Clare, however, people are used to cliffs, and do not, apparently, think much of them, its visitors preferring Lisdoonvarna, where there are no cliffs, but several brand-new hotels, and springs said to be excellent for lumbago, and where you can have the height of good eating, and drinking too, if your tastes incline that way. Three hundred feet below the ends of their toes the gulls were sitting by myriads—grey feathers upon grey rock—not to be distinguished, save by a very practised eye. Higher up, where the rocks were more friable, puffins squatted in colonies, each before a hole which he had scraped for himself. Lower, the outlying rocks and skerries were black or brown with cormorants, stretching lean necks, and gazing ravenously upon the water, green as their own eyes. Beneath all these again the dark heaving surface was mottled and traversed in every direction by moving reticulations of white,

broad in some places as the sails of a man-of-war, attenuated in others until they were no thicker than the thinnest of thin threads, rising and falling, sweeping rhythmically hither and thither, under the impulse from below. The wet rocks took the sun's rays upon their glittering sides; the spray rose in the air like the dust of a submarine explosion, and fell again with a thud that was like the fall of many fortresses, draining away through their twenty thousand mouths, and streaming back to sea, to be promptly caught and sent back upon the same errand again and again, and over and over again.

Familiar as it was to both of them, neither of the two men was wholly indifferent to the scene. Hurrish drew a long breath, and his eyes grew dim and misty. Maurice's, on the other hand, brightened, and his hands clenched, as the warm west wind sent its strong elixir through his veins, and breathed encouraging promises into his ears,—promises big with coming realisation. It seemed to him as if whole fleets of good things were

being floated in from the West—the Land of Promise—fleets of which “shmart young fellars” like himself would be the captains, as by nature and reason they ought to be, able to turn all opposing old fogies overboard, or string them up to the yard-arms if need were. He was an orator by nature as well as by calculation, and he felt that this wind inspired him. What a tide of eloquence, what illustrations, what denunciations, what gorgeously decorated hopes and anticipations flooded his brains and rose to his lips as he stood drinking in that warm west wind—very breath of Celtic eloquence. If he had had a crowd about him at that moment, he thought excitedly, begad, how he *could* have spoken! how he could have thundered against the “enemy”; what “argiments” he could have used—arguments, it need hardly be said, addressed exclusively to the imagination,—so much larger and more interesting a field to work upon than any dull plodding faculties which demand that the arguments addressed to *them* should be proved,

or, at any rate, provable. It really seemed a wicked waste of a magnificent opportunity.

Hurrish's thoughts had meanwhile got diverted to less heroic and more concrete objects. A little to the left of where they were standing, a narrow zigzag path led down to a small saleen—*anglicè*, little creek—famous for the supply of seaweed which collected there after every storm. A woman was coming up this path with a "kish" of oar-weeds and bladder-wracks upon her shoulders, which she had been collecting below. The last bit of the ascent was very steep, and the poor creature was evidently nearly worn out. Her face, bathed in perspiration, was expressive of a perfect agony of exhaustion. With a sudden ejaculation, Hurrish ran down to meet her, and, bidding her turn round, took the kish off her back, and carried it in his hands to the top of the cliff. Even for his strength it was a considerable load.

"That was Marty O'Kelly's wife over from Tullalogue," he said, when the poor woman,

with many thanks, had again taken up her load and trudged away. "You wudn't think it to luk at her, but siven year since she was as purty an' nate a gurl as ye'd wish to see—not a spryer at a jig nor a riddier at a wake in Clare! 'Tis a crool hard life on the women hereabouts, an' no mistake, God help thim!" he added, pityingly.

Maurice merely nodded. His thoughts were otherwise engaged, and he did not care to have them diverted to such uninteresting details as these.

"I'll be oncommon glad when you're married t' Alley an' took her away wid yer," Hurrish went on. "She's too dilicate an' purty for this work entoirely. 'Tis thim sort gives in first, and gits bated an' ould. 'Twud jist break the heart in me, so 't wud, if I seen poor little Alley lookin' all nohow and draggledy like that a one"—pointing to the retreating figure of Mrs Marty O'Kelly, of whom only a very short red petticoat, two lean brown heels, and a mountain of wet seaweed was visible.

For several reasons Maurice Brady felt aggrieved by this speech. For one thing, it jarred unpleasantly with that high tide of sentiment upon which he had been floating so buoyantly, and seemed to drag him back to the mud and shallows of unilluminated everyday life. It brought back, too, the recollection of that start and look of dismay with which Alley had greeted his proposal of transplantation, and the double irritation found vent in his reply.

“You seem in a tremendous great hurry to get rid of Alley this afternoon, whatever the reason is!” he said irritably. “I’m sure, if I saw my way to taking her away at once, I’d do it, and be delighted. ’Tis hard, I suppose, on a man feeding and lodging a girl that’s no blood kin of his own, and so, I’ll be bound, Alley feels too; but, please God, ’twont be for long now.”

Hurrish’s broad face reddened with sudden anger. “Is it wantin’ to be *rid* of her ye think I am?” he said, in a tone of sterner displeasure than the good-natured fellow had

often been known to show before. “Ye niver made a greater mistake in all yer life if ye think *that*. ’Twud be like a man wantin’ to throw away a little juwl that had come and pinned itself to his breast—he’d need be a born fool, or hav the divil’s own black heart, ’ud do sich a thing. An’ ye talk of her aitin’! Poor Alley! ’twudn’t make the difference of a full-growed chicken an’ a pullet all she’d ate wan way or t’other in the day, God hilp her! ’Tis her own swate self I’m thinkin’ of, that niver complains, but wark, wark from marnin’ to noight, an’ allays a smoile for ivery wan! ’Tull be loike pullin’ the very heart out ov me brist to let her go; but sure, a man wud be no betherer nor a baste that ’ud think ov himsel’ and not of a swate crather that’s no more fit for harsh tratement nor the flowers, nor to be mixed up wid common folks ’t all!”

Maurice Brady felt a momentary twinge of discomfort, almost shame—a most unusual sensation. He was even visited by a passing

suspicion that Hurrish's view of the matter might be the higher, on the whole, of the two. He shook it off, however, by saying to himself that Hurrish was so stupid and narrow-minded, he always took you to mean something entirely different from what you really did,—it was sheer waste of time talking to him. Of course, he must have Alley's interest more at heart than any one else. Wasn't he going to marry her—bring her up to his own level—make a “lady” of her? What stronger proof of affection could any man give than *that*?

The two men parted soon after this,—Maurice retracing his steps along the top of the cliff, skirting the heights of Moher, where the Hag's Head rose dark and threateningly against the sky, then rounding the grass slopes of Liscanor Bay, past Lehinch, to the greener and more commonplace stretch of country where Miltown-Malbaw stands. Several times, in the course of his walk, Hurrish's words recurred to his mind, and each time with a fresh sense of annoyance.

Hurrish! it really was too absurd! The idea of a fellow like that affecting to have finer feelings and a tenderer regard for Alley than himself! The idea was simply intolerable!

It was so intolerable that it was fortunately easy to prove that it was impossible, and before he had reached his destination Maurice had quite got over his temporary self-annoyance, and, as a consequence, had almost forgiven Hurrish. He was not a bad creature in his way, he admitted, and had a very proper appreciation for those above him; but when he came to talk of anything beyond his cows and potatoes—really it *was* laughable. He wondered now at himself for having listened with so much patience.

On going into his lodgings he found a couple of friends waiting for him, who at once began eagerly talking about a report that had come down from Dublin as to the chance of an election then pending. Maurice was regarded as quite the “coming man” in the

political circles of Miltown-Malbay and Le-hinch. His gift of speaking gave him that sort of direct influence which—common as that gift is—it never fails to procure amongst his countrymen, who, like the Athenians of old, live mainly by their ears. He was brimful, too, of all the socialism of the day, knew all the latest catch-words, and was a *doctrinaire* of quite the most advanced type. Though he had declined—chiefly from prudential notions—to join any of the secret societies established in the neighbourhood, he was upon friendly terms with most of their wire-pullers—more courted, in fact, than if he had actually committed himself. To a young man with not much to lose and a great deal to hope for, a state of social ferment, of “veiled” rebellion, is undoubtedly a highly commendable state of affairs. To the old, the timid, the owners of the perishable goods of this world, it may be a source of bitter trouble, anxiety, and consuming terror, but certainly not to him. Maurice perceived this fully, and had often

reflected that the revolutionary elements afloat in the country made it—despite some self-evident drawbacks—a much more promising field for a “shmart fellar” who knew what was what, and had thoroughly realised his own good points, than a more settled and less fluctuating social condition would probably have been. In this sense, and to this extent, he was unquestionably and unreservedly patriotic.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UGLY NEIGHBOUR.

MEANWHILE the position of affairs between Hurrish and the elder Brady was growing daily worse and worse. The rate at which hatred increases and develops, under favourable circumstances, has apparently never yet been scientifically ascertained; it increases, at any rate, not arithmetically, but geometrically, like the germ in the yeast, or the aphid on a rose-bush, which was one yesterday and is a million millions to-day. Take an originally brutalised one-idea'd nature, without a restraining influence of any sort—even the jail and the hangman—and plant in that nature the seeds of a hatred, the object of which it is continually being

brought into contact with, and the result will startle even those who believe themselves experts in the darker capabilities of our poor humanity. Mat Brady's hatred of Hurrish dated from years back: he could hardly perhaps himself have said how or why it began, but everything that had happened since had gone to foster it.

That this result was not a little helped on by the raw whisky in which he habitually soaked himself needs no telling. Acting upon an originally amiable foundation, drink excites chiefly to maudlin sentimentality, rarely to violence. Acting upon a brutal foundation, it arouses the blackest of animal passions, which grow and grow until the drunkard himself becomes the mere slave of them, and differs little, if at all, from the homicidal madman. To injure Hurrish in some way, to have him in his grip, to wreak his vengeance upon him, was his one thought night and day; he lived upon it, ate, slept, breathed, and grew drunk upon it. In this direction his ordin-

arily sluggish nature was even spurred to activity, tortures unknown to Ojibeway Indians, or the familiars of the Inquisition, flattering his dreams and exciting his waking thoughts — tortures which he had inflicted, or was about shortly to inflict, upon the unconscious Hurrish. That these imaginings would long ago have been turned to reality is unquestionable, but for one deterring fact. Mat Brady—sot though he was — was enormously strong, capable of fighting any two other natives of Tubbamina. Hurrish O'Brien, however, was stronger still, and could easily have thrashed two Mat Bradys—had, indeed, already administered condign chastisement on more than one occasion,—as, for instance, when that amiable person had waylaid poor little Alley Sheehan, and frightened her half out of her innocent life, from sheer spite of her protector. Then indeed Hurrish's wrath had not been slack, nor his hand slow to smite !

Even the neighbourhood of Tubbamina—

not a censorious region as regards violent crimes — was scandalised by Mat Brady's excesses. He had not atoned either for his failings in this direction by any marked virtue in another. His ill - temper and brutish misanthropy had kept him from sharing the predominant excitements and dangerous councils of his neighbours. He was not a member of any secret society—nay, was even suspected of having been more than once tampered with by the enemy, though of this there was no actual proof.

What more perhaps than anything else infuriated him with Hurrish, was the indifference with which, as a general rule, that good - natured individual regarded his proceedings. Toleration is not at all an Irish characteristic, and is perhaps the mental attitude which an Irishman of the baser sort least endures or forgives in an antagonist. Abuse him, curse him—he answers you with curses readier and more fluent than your own, then goes his way, and forgets the matter. Pass over his attack in pity or

contempt, and he will bear you a grudge to the last hour of your life.

His determination to take the vacant Maloney farm had originated wholly in the desire to come to close quarters with his enemy,—hate of this burning kind, like love itself, not easily brooking distance from its object. That farm “marched” with Hurrish’s; and the opportunities which a possessor of it would enjoy for harming and generally annoying that hated individual, filled his soul with spasms of ferocious delight. That he already occupied more ground than he was capable of working, and that the farm—even at the low rent at which it was offered—would be a loss rather than a gain to him, was nothing. Such trifling considerations were not even weighed in the balance. Mat Brady would have parted with every shilling he possessed in the world, and have brought himself to the workhouse or the emigrant-ship, if by that means he could only at last have wreaked his rage upon Hurrish.

They were not safe times for a man—no matter with how purely private a motive—to take a farm from which another had been evicted. No popularity, no previous reputation for virtue or patriotism, would have made it a safe proceeding, and Brady had neither popularity nor virtuous reputation to intercede upon his behalf. The very day after he had formally taken possession, and had had his cattle driven into their new pasture, an enormous skull and cross-bones were found rudely daubed in black and white upon the wall which divided his old and new farm; and stepping out of his cabin-door early the following morning, he had all but stumbled into a sinister-looking trench, dug in the night across the path, and almost touching the threshold. It was as significant as the unstrung bow-string of the Chinese emperor, and not less likely to be followed by serious consequences.

With the one idea'dness of your thorough-going hater, Brady set down both these demonstrations solely to Hurrish's account.

Hurrish hated him ; Hurrish would do anything to spite him ; Hurrish, he was convinced, would kill him if he could ; the only chance of preventing him from doing so, was by himself first killing Hurrish,—the whole question, to his mind, narrowed itself to that.

Like every Irishman of his class—whether Coercion Acts are in force or whether they are not—he had an old gun hidden away in the thatch of his cabin. This gun he now took down, and occupied his leisure moments in cleaning, scouring, and oiling it, and preparing bullets out of stray bits of old lead laid by with some such purpose. He even took the trouble of carrying it one afternoon under his coat to the top of Lugna-Culliagh, the conical-shaped hill in which the valley ended, and there, safely shrouded by the loneliness, practising at a patch of lichen on a rock, so that, when the occasion arose, his hand might be safe and his revenge sure.

All this he was able to do with the more

ease that he was quite alone in the cabin—his ferocious temper rendering it impossible for any one else to inhabit it with him, even had he desired such company. His brother was away at Miltown-Malbay; the two men whom he employed upon the farm had cabins of their own; even the beggars, who find gratuitous food and lodging at every cabin they pass, hurried silently past Mat Brady's door, so effectively had his brutal reputation shielded him from demands which no poverty, however abject, is held in Ireland to be any excuse from exercising.

When his day's work was over, he got into the habit of every evening betaking himself to that group of ruined oratories which, as the reader will remember, lay upon the verge of the two farms, and there, coiled up in one of the cells built for the purposes of devotion, with his loaded gun held between his knees, he would spend long hours watching, waiting, on the mere chance of some accident bringing his hated enemy within his reach.

More than once he fell asleep at his post, and awoke in the grey of the morning, cramped, miserable, a prey to all the horrors of the habitual drunkard who, for some purpose, abstains for a while from the familiar demon. Even then, however, hate triumphed, and seizing his gun, he would crawl out of his refuge into the nipping night air, and stride backwards and forwards over the rocks, his eyes sweeping to and fro in the darkness, hungry, as the eyes of a wild beast are hungry, when it fails to secure its prey. Twice he went down and watched the O'Briens' cabin all night, crouched in the shelter of the little "bohereen" that ran at the back of it. No opportunity, however, arose; Hurrish never appeared, and he was obliged, when daylight came, to withdraw, cold, cramped, wretched, and fuller of hatred than ever, to the shelter of his own cabin.

While he was occupying himself in this cheerful fashion, his own doom had been decided upon. Several farms had lately been reoccupied in the neighbourhood; an example,

therefore, was badly wanted, and an example, it was decided, was to be made of him. He knew the penalty; he had chosen to act in opposition to it; nothing surely could be simpler or more conclusive. Between the judicial sentence and the carrying out of an execution there is apt, however, to be some delay. Brady was an exceedingly awkward individual to meddle with, and there was a general feeling, even amongst the men who clamoured loudest for his punishment, that some one else ought to be the person to carry out the sentence. Why Andy Holohun didn't do it, Peter O'Flannagan, for instance, couldn't possibly imagine. Andy was always talking of his hatred of land-grabbers, and here was a land-grabber ready to his hand, yet he showed no disposition to grapple with him, while Andy was equally astonished at the unaccountable backwardness of Peter. So scandalous a want of public spirit as was exhibited on that occasion at Tubbamina has rarely, in fact, been paralleled in the history of Ireland!

Maurice, as it happened, had been away from Clare during this exciting time, having been sent to Limerick by the shop to which he belonged to select light goods for the approaching season, and it was not therefore until his return that he learnt what was on foot. When he did so his wrath was great, and was directed chiefly against Hurrish, whom he held to be mainly responsible for this fresh outburst of popular feeling against his brother. If *Hurrish* would have left him alone, he said to himself, other people would have done so too. The latter was engaged a few days later in digging bait in the Donologue saleen, preparatory to an afternoon's fishing, when, chancing to look up, he saw Maurice coming towards him over the sands. The young man looked excited and fierce. His face was paler than usual, and his red moustache twirled dangerously.

"What's this, Hurrish, 'bout you and Mat?" he began at once, in a tone of violent displeasure.

Hurrish paused in his digging, and stood

still staring at him with unfeigned astonishment.

“I dunno as there’s anythink *particular*, Morry,” he said mildly, resting one foot upon the spade while he leaned his weight upon the other.

“Anything particular! Why, I’m told there’s been a meeting over at Tullalogue at the Harp of Erin, and a gun bought, and the lots drawn, and all, and ’tis you as is to do the job on him.”

Hurrish opened his eyes. “Is it a *killin’* job ye mane?” he inquired. “Not batin’, nor frightenin’, nor the loikes ov that, but killin’ out an’ out?”

“Killing? Of course; what would I mean but killing? Much Mat would care for anything else.”

“Then ’tis the biggest lie iver was tould—as big as th’ ould Bull Rock out there,” Hurrish said, slowly. “Sure I haven’t been nigh th’ Harp of Irin this month o’ Sundays, nor don’t mane nayther. That affeer of poor Buggle turned me stomach—so ’t did.”

Maurice Brady's wrath was brought to a sudden standstill. He had come over from Miltown-Malbay in a towering rage, determined to have it out with Hurrish; no one should meddle with *his* brother with impunity! Now, however, he was puzzled. Hurrish was no liar. His manner, too, was quite inconsistent with the theory of his having made up his mind to avenge his own and the community's wrongs upon the common enemy. It was neither hilarious nor yet morose, the two invariable concomitants of such a resolution.

"'Tis true all the same, then, whatever you may say," he answered, doggedly. "It was one as was there that told me all about it."

"An' how *cud* it be true, Morry, avick, whin I tell you 'tis the first word good or bad I've heard of it, an' have no more intintion of shootin' him aither nor ov shootin' me own mother? Not but what he desarves it," he added, parenthetically."

Maurice turned and walked a few steps

off, irritably kicking aside as he did so the small round worm casts which mottled the sand. •

“Look you here, Hurrish, and mind now what I’m saying,” he said at last, turning round and speaking in that tone of authority which he had latterly begun to assume with his older companion; “I wouldn’t have any one think I was forgetful—not obliged, I mean, for anything you did for me when I was a gos—when I was a boy. At the same time, I tell you plainly, if you or any one else, I don’t care who the devil ’tis”—(he was working himself up into fresh anger by this time)—“has hand, act, or part in meddling with *my* brother Mat, sure as God is above us I’ll have his life! If there’s justice in Ireland, or out of it, I’ll hang him!—God, I will! I’ve taken an oath to do it, and I’m not one to go a-breakin’ *my* oaths. Sure as we’re standin’ here, I’ll do it, so now I’ve given you fair warning. Friend or enemy, it don’t make no matter to me; I’ll have his life. No one shall have it to say

that he killed Maurice Brady's brother, and that he stood by and put up with it; I'd die rayther than have such a thing said."

There was no affectation about this violence. Cool-headed as he was, there were certain things which moved him strongly. Mat *as* Mat he cared little about, but Mat *as his* brother was a sacred object, and any one who laid hands on it should assuredly feel the weight of his revenge.

Hurrish drove the spade which he was still holding in his hands into the sand, and left it standing there. He, too, was considerably excited by the other's passion. It did not anger him as he would have been angered by most men's violence; on the contrary, he respected the young fellow for taking his brother's part, sot and irreclaimable savage though he was. He did not say, as a harsher or more experienced critic might have done, that it was because Mat Brady was *his* brother—that he belonged to him—that the young man's egotism was so rampant, that it extended to anything that touched him—

self, however little he might care for it personally; he simply gave him credit for his spirit, and for his sense of family obligation—a trait which always wins respect in Ireland. If at that moment he could have made Mat Brady's life absolutely safe, for Morry's sake he would have done so, despite his own quarrel with that most obnoxious of Calibans. He did not see, however, that there was any way in which such a consummation could be accomplished.

"The buoys is terrible sot agin him, there's no denyin' that, Morry," he said, scratching his head seriously with an air of reflection. "Though I've had nought to do wid their meetin's, I've hard talk 'bout the country—plinty. 'Tis an essample they say 's wanted—lastways, that's what big Moriaty—him that's back from 'Merica—says. No good won't be got for Oireland 't all widout thar's more *essamples*. Dades an' not words is what's wantin', an' that's what the Laigue's wantin' too, he says."

"Then he's a d——d fool, and they're all

a pack of d——d blundering savages, that's what they are!" the young man burst out fiercely. "Mustn't *I* know what the Laigue—the League—wants better nor they do?—ignorant beasts! I that am hand and glove with Mulcahy Donallen, that's own cousin to Mr Egan, and as safe to be returned for Ballynagaraty at the next election as if he was sitting in it! 'Tis the blunderingest thing ever a set of fools did, murdering here, and murdering there—and what for? Nothing but just their own spite and folly and devilments! Much they think of the Cause, the blethering idiots! If *they* was to be put out of it,—strung up here in a row, and only the decent *sinsible* men left,—it would be about the best thing could happen to the country, and so you may tell them, with my compliments."

(Maurice's eloquence, it will be observed, had for the moment entirely got the better of his newly acquired phraseology. But what eloquence, it may be asked, is worth a rush that does not do so?)

Hurrish scratched his head again, puzzled, yet carried away by his companion's rhetoric.

"Well, Morry, ye knows more about it nor I do, *that's* sartain," he said, in a tone of conviction; "an' if the Laigue ud only give out the word to have no more bloodshiddin', nor maimin' ov baists, nor frightenin' ov women, nor nothink ov that sort all over the country from this day out, there's not a buoy ud be gladderer nor meself, so thar wudn't. An' as to what ye say 'bout Mat, ye may make yer moind aisy so far as I'm concerned. Me an' Mat has niver got on yit, an' we're not loikely for to begin for to do so now, but as far as his loife goes, 'tis as safe for me as if he were th' holy Father—God forgive me for sayin' such a thing! Cum what may, I'll not forget he's your brother, Morry, me buoy; for there was ner a one I warmed to yit as I warmed t' you. An' why not?—you that was loike a chilt ov me own, in an' out allays, and that cute and cliver wid yer tongue, 'twas a wunder; didn't I allus say from the furst ye'd be a gran' man? We

mayn't be jist so thick now," Hurrish added, after a pause devoted to reminiscence; "'taint surprisin', so much as ye've larned, and such a gintleman born as ye look — speakin' so foine, 'tis a wonder t' hear ye—still for me yer the same, Morry dear, an' wud be if ye was the King ov all Oireland! An' as to threatenin' t' hav me hung, an' the loikes ov that, sure I know 'tis the last thing ye mane! 'Taint *that* ud be stoppin' me anyhow, but the thought that 't ud be displasin' to you, an' t' Alley, too, since what's yours is hers. Wudn't I cut off me own head, an' gladly too, 'fore I'd hurt aither the one or th' tother of ye?"

Maurice made no immediate reply to this unusual effort of oratory upon Hurrish's part. His anger was too fresh to subside readily. He was somewhat mollified, however, by the other's words. He had always been proud of his influence over this big, hot-tempered, warm-hearted fellow, whom everybody in the neighbourhood was more or less in awe of on account of his strength, in spite of its

being qualified by his ordinarily easy-going disposition. Latterly, it is true, there had been more irritation than complacency in his relations towards him—a sort of indulgence and forbearance on Hurrish's part, which grated at times against his pride. He had a feeling that Hurrish under no conceivable circumstances could be afraid of him, and Maurice was a man who liked to feel that he could inspire awe. He was annoyed too about Alley. Jealousy, under the circumstances, was, he assured himself, out of the question, still he felt irritated. That look of dismay with which his plan of transplantation had been received by her kept constantly recurring, and there were not wanting other incidents which showed Hurrish's influence to be greater than he considered it ought to have been. In the end, however, he made up his mind to accept the latter's assurances—provisionally, at all events.

“All right, Hurrish, I'll take it as you say,” he said, in a tone of somewhat condescending graciousness. “I know you're

fond of me, and, unless you were led away, you would not wish, I'm sure, to do anything that was displeasing to me. Shake hands."

They shook hands. Hurrish melted, on his side, almost to tears by Maurice's goodness. It gave him the keenest delight to think that all was once more smooth between them. He had an admiration, amounting to absolute worship, for the other, which, when it inspires an older for a younger man, is probably far stronger and more deeply rooted than the other way. He was in a state of the wildest and most uproarious satisfaction all that evening, which, but for his known sobriety, might fairly have given rise to the most injurious suspicions. Poor Hurrish ! His satisfaction was not long-lived, but, at least, it was warm and glowing for the time it lasted. While we are about it, let us, above all else, give thanks for that veil which hangs between us and our nearest future. Were it to be lifted—nay, but an inch or two—how many of us, I wonder, could confidently confront our pillows this evening ?

CHAPTER X.

HURRISH'S CRIME.

IT was the day of the half-yearly fair at Ballyvaughan, the metropolis, in some sort, of the Burren. Like a good many other metropolises, it is not particularly conveniently situated as regards that area of which it is the nucleus. Lying upon the sea-shore to the extreme north of the region, it suggests, and is, a fishing much more than an agricultural centre. The straggling single street sloping directly down to the harbour consists of some three or perhaps four dozen whitewashed structures, the more important ones slated, the rest thatched and overtopped in summer with a gorgeous nodding crown of wild-flowers—sedums, poppies, snapdragons—town-gardens of a distinctively Irish pattern!

Hurrish had some calves to dispose of, and had brought them overnight to Ballyvaughan, their chance of a good sale being naturally better if not previously overtired. Feeling uneasy towards evening as to what might be taking place at home with Mat Brady so close at hand, and himself away, he left the calves in charge of Lep and a herdsman, and walked all the way back to his cabin, arriving there about midnight, and starting again by cock-crow next morning.

Early as it was, every one was astir to give him his stirabout, and see him off. Little Katty came toddling across the floor from the other room, half-naked, and rosy with sleep, and seized him by the flap of his coat, as he sat upon a low stool hastily devouring that satisfying condiment.

"Dada, bring Katty sugey-shtick," she whispered, rubbing her little rough head, like some small tame animal, against his sleeve, and looking up in his face with an insinuating grin.

It was an appeal which Hurrish, even at

his busiest, could never resist. He picked Miss Katty up on his knee, and gave her a mouthful of the stirabout, by way perhaps of an instalment.

“Sugey-shtick indade! git out wid ye, yer imperint Kitteen,” he said, admiringly. “D’ye think yer dada has nought to do but be goin’ round the town gettin’ you sugar-shticks! Be aff this instant minute,”—he set her down and got up himself, taking his blackthorn from where it was lounging at ease against a corner of the wall as he passed.

Katty however was not to be daunted. With a crow of delight, she trotted after him to the door, where she again repeated her demand, laying hold of the formidable blackthorn as she did so to enforce it.

“Alley, Alley Sheehan! Och, Alley, cum quick! I’m helt! I’m cotched! sure I won’t be able to get away to Ballyvaughan the day! Kitteen’s a houldin’ ov me!—Och, wirrastrue, wirrastrue, what will I do at all, at all?” he exclaimed, pretending to shake the

stick violently, while the child capered and shrieked with delight at the other end of it.

Alley ran to the rescue, and picked up Katty, still capering and shouting, in her arms. Hurrish, however, delayed yet a minute longer to kiss the little red and brown face thus brought nearer to a level with his own.

"Maybe I'll be seein' Morry over beyant," he whispered, with a glance towards his mother, who was still by the fire. "Have ye ere a bit ov message for him, Alley 'cushla?"

Alley did not immediately answer. She twisted the stocking she had been knitting around the needles, so as to keep their points from Miss Katty's wriggling pink legs, and looked down.

"I dun know as I have, Hurrish, an' I dun know as he'd care 'bout wan aither," she said, not coquettishly, but seriously.

Hurrish looked disturbed.

"Blur an' agers, Alley, don't be sayin' sich things!" he said, in a tone of eager remon-

strance. “ Sure the pore buoy luvs ye as he luvs his own sowl ! he luvs yer very shady on the rocks, as any wan wid half an oye can see. Yer thinkin’, I s’pose, he’s a bit heady these toimes — that’s what’s in yer moind. But after all what wonder ?—so much as he’s thought ov—ivery wan in the whole counthry rinning afther him, an’ consultin’ wid him !—Sure if he wasn’t a troifle ’bove hisself ’t wud be *onnatural*. But he’s the good heart Morry has, an’ that’s at the bottom ov all. He’s not loike one ov thim darty *bodaghs*, so sit up whin they get a bit ’bove thimselves that there is no holdin’ thim—loike an ass-cart wid a new sate, that takes itself for a coach-and-four—that proud, the spalpeens, they wudn’t shtop and spake to the mother that bore thim ! But Morry’s not that sort, divil a bit. He’s the good heart, an’ that’s iverything in this mortal world ! ”

Alley sighed. Hurrish must know best, she thought, but still—

“ The fact is, yer altogether too young an’

ignarant, Alley, to ondershtand the granjeur there is in Morry, an' that's the truth," Hurrish went on, in a tone of lofty superiority. "There is not the aqual of him in Clare—no, nor in twinty counties round, so there isn't. He'll be a gran' man yet, as I've telled ye offen, jist you wait an' see if he isn't—the top an' king of thim all! An' thin sure 'tis yourself 'll be gran' too! Trath, 't il be a wonder if ye spake to any ov us 't all!"

Alley smiled a little, but rather sadly. "I don't want wan bit for to be gran'," she said, almost tearfully.

"Och, Alley asthore, what's cum t'ye 't all? I know the most of the colleens does be allays changin' and choppin' ov their moinds, loike the sky, that's blue wan minute an' rid the nixt, but I thought you was betherer nor to go on wid sich wark. Don't ye know roight well that 'tis wicked to be choppin' an' changin' yer moind wid a man? Is it breakin' his heart ye want wid sich talk?"

Alley made no reply. She looked up at

Hurrish earnestly for a minute, as if about to speak. Then, with a sudden blush, she turned away, and appeared to be absorbed in arranging Miss Katty's disarranged garment—a somewhat complicated task, one of that young lady's fat brown legs having just succeeded in getting through a considerable aperture in her little red flannel petticoat.

Satisfied that his exhortation had had its due effect, Hurrish pursued his way, turning up Gortnacoppin, alongside of its milky torrent, fed by the violent rain of the day before. It was a lovely morning. The sun was still low, and the rocks which overhung the path flung heavy violet shadows before his feet. Everything seemed to be either violet or blue,—a sort of spiritualised blue, such as these desolate limestone regions sometimes show in clear weather. The wet places, where a slow ooze crept over the rocks, showed a faintly blueish iridescence, the blue-grey sheets of rock, the grey-blue sweeps of sky, the blue-grey sweeps of Atlantic—it was all steeped in light, pene-

trated with light, pathetic, solitary, ethereal—a spiritualised world, fitted, one would say, for anchorites and pious souls “enskyed and sainted,” whose traffic is less with this warm substantial earth of ours than with the unfamiliar heavens.

Hurrish, his thoughts filled chiefly now with his calves, tramped on, his shadow flinging itself in exaggerated bigness upon the weather-worn surfaces, his iron-studded shoes awaking sharp echoes upon the level rocks. Trailing branches of pale pink spiny rose dangled out of the crevices overhead; masses of blood-red crane’s-bill dotted the pale grey sheets of limestone, and the dwarfed bushes of hawthorn which rose out of the stony dykes were white with blossom.

He had reached the amphitheatre where the oratories stood, and where the stream disappears with a great rushing, bubbling noise into the bowels of the earth, when his eye was caught by a large object, conspicuously white amongst the surrounding grey-ness, lying close to a reddish granite boulder,

raised, as many of these iceberg-dropped "foreign" boulders are, upon a foot or stalk of limestone, which, protected by its cover, has remained intact, while the rock surrounding it has been gradually worn away.

Striding up to the spot, he discovered that the white object was no other than a sheep, —one of his *own* sheep, stark, stiff, and dead, a hideous gash across its innocent white throat telling out too plainly how it had come by its end.

Hurrish loved his beasts, not merely for their money value, but with that natural liking of a warm-hearted man for anything living that he calls his own. Next to his children, to Maurice Brady, and Alley, they were, perhaps, the things he cared most for in the world. A hot tide of anger rushed through his veins, and his cheerful, open face grew suddenly red and corrugated with passion, as he looked fiercely round in search of the perpetrator of the deed. As usual, however, none was to be seen.

He was still standing there looking down at the dead beast, when he was startled by a slight but significant sound. The thin clear whistle of a bullet whizzed past close to his head, and the next second the bullet itself fell flattened off the granite boulder beside him, while, at the same moment, the solitary valley rang with the report of a gun.

Hurrish started upright, and, with an instinct of self-preservation, ran to the other side of the boulder, thus putting it between himself and the direction from which the shot had come. He was only just in time ! Another bullet whizzed by, grazing his shoulder as it did so, striking against the rock, and again falling deadened at his feet, while again the report resounded through the silence, dying away only when it had crossed the watershed, a faint prolonged echo returning with a hollow boom from the valley beyond.

Although a minute before the valley had seemed bare as a man's hand, no idea of supernatural agency on this occasion occurred

to his brain. Leprehauns and ghosts are known to throw stones, and even to upset curaghs, but no one, even in Connaught, has ever heard of their firing a gun! The question which now arose was, how was he to look round the corner of the boulder without thereby offering a mark to the enemy who had twice missed him so narrowly? A sudden idea struck him. Stooping down to where the boulder was raised, as already explained, upon a limestone foot or pedestal, in the same way that a mushroom is raised by its stalk, he peeped through the worn-away space below, and was thus able to command the whole of the valley before him. Straight in front lay the little group of oratories, the oblique rays of the rising sun gleaming upon their low grey roofs, and upon the white cross set as a pious symbol above the tiny doorway, and, underneath this white cross, in the very doorway itself of the one nearest to him, he saw a face—the red, repulsive, baboon-like face of Mat Brady peering out as an animal's face peers from

its lair, the light catching upon the barrel of a gun which he held in his hands.

Hurrish's indolent, good-tempered soul was roused to fury in a moment at this sight. Mat Brady it was, then, that had fired at him ! Mat equally of course that had killed his sheep ! *Mat*, whom he had spared a dozen times after the most outrageous provocations ! *Mat*, who, by the unwritten laws of the neighbourhood, stood condemned to death ! It was the quarry attacking the hunter—the criminal assaulting his judge ; the last drop in the long gathering cup of wrath ! All the man's previous provocations rushed through his brain in a single fiery moment, as a flame rushes through a pile of inflammable materials. Every other consideration,—his own desire to avoid quarrels—his recent promise to Maurice,—everything went for nothing before that suddenly uprisen fire of vengeance. Clutching the blackthorn in his hand, and utterly heedless of the danger to himself, he rushed from behind his defence, up the hill, over the

steep rocks, springing across the fissures, straight upon the little pious hermitage, with its innocent small white cross, and that hideous brutalised face in the middle of its ruined doorway.

The suddenness of the impulse proved his salvation. If Mat Brady had kept calm, now was his opportunity. He had not provided, however, against the emergency. His gun was unloaded, and, being a muzzle-loader, required time to recharge. Unarmed, he was, as he well knew, no match for Hurrish. Panic seized his soul, and he sprang from his lair and turned to flee. To scramble through that narrow doorway, however, took time. Hardly had he got himself free from it, and begun to ascend the stony incline, before Hurrish's step was close at his heels, Hurrish's voice sounded in his ears. Then, like a beast, he turned at bay, and like a beast's was the face which presented itself,—the lowering brow, the huge jaw, the mouth distorted and gnashing with rage and terror! A hideous sight—to dream of, not to tell—a man in the like-

ness of a beast, worse than the very ugliest variety with hoofs or claws.

His gun being useless in any other way, he tried to club it: before he had time to do so, however, Hurrish had struck it out of his hands, and the next instant "crash," with one sweeping, annihilating blow, the black-thorn had descended like a sledge-hammer full upon his head,—not on the top, where the thickness of skull would have defied any blow, but a little to one side, full on the temple—that part, owing to the position of his head, having come uppermost; and with an oath, strangled in its very utterance, Mat Brady fell backwards, and lay at full length upon the ground, his head striking against a rock with a dull hideous thud as he descended.

Hurrish remained where he was—the black-thorn ready for action—waiting to see him rise. He would not strike even Mat Brady when he was *down*. Minute followed minute, however, and still no sign of life. The echoes awakened by the struggle died slowly away,

as a roughened circle dies upon a still pool. The uncouth body lay there quietly at his feet like a log that had been felled for burning. Could he be shamming death? Why did he not get up? What was the meaning of it? That the man could be dead, or even badly hurt, did not at first occur to him. Death from a single blow of a stick is almost unknown, particularly in Ireland, where the weapon is in much repute and constant practice. He was stunned simply—"knocked silly,"—and would get up again in another minute. He waited accordingly, expecting to see the chest begin to heave, the eyes to open, the hands to clench themselves—waited and waited. Minute slowly followed minute, but still Mat Brady neither stirred nor showed any signs of returning animation.

Puzzled, and rather startled, Hurrish at length stooped down over the fallen man, took hold of him by an arm, and lifted him into a sitting position. His head fell back, however, limply upon one shoulder, the other hand and arm hung down helplessly at his side,

his eyes, partially opened, looked up at the sky with a hideous distorted expression, but without any sign of life. A cold sense of discomfort began to creep over the other. He had seen dead men before—men, too, who had come to their deaths by violent means,—and he began to have an uneasy suspicion that this one before him closely resembled them; an uneasy recollection, too, that his own arm had come down with very unmistakable velocity.

Laying Mat Brady down upon the rock, he sped back to the stream, and returned with his felt hat full of water, which he dashed into his late adversary's face, then waited anxiously to see the effect. There was no effect at all! The water poured off the man's face as it would off a stone: not the twinkle of an eyelid, not the slightest quivering motion, followed the experiment. The sudden collapse of that mass of animal strength, a few minutes ago so brimful of life and of vindictive passion, had something terrifying about it. It was so utterly unex-

pected, that there seemed to Hurrish to be something uncanny, almost supernatural, about it,—like the trick of an evil goblin. The unbroken silence of the stony amphitheatre, too, was appalling. Had there been any one to share the situation, it would not have been nearly so bad. It was not the mere fact of Brady being killed, so much as the whole circumstances,—the suddenness, the unaccountableness of the phenomena,—that quelled him. He felt daunted, as if a cold hand had been unexpectedly laid upon him in the height of his passion.

What was to be done? that was the next question. If Mat Brady was really dead—and it must be owned that it looked uncomfortably like it,—then his own safety must be provided for. What was he to do? Where was he to go? As to giving himself voluntarily up to the authorities, and explaining the unintentionalness of the homicide,—*that* idea, needless to say, did not occur to him for a moment. It would have

been repugnant to every sentiment of his class, in whose eyes the law is *the* Arch enemy,—the one thing which it behoves every man, in honour no less than in self-defence, to avoid having any dealings with. There was a rule, however, for such cases—a very well established and habitually followed one. This rule was quietly to walk away, and betake yourself to your customary occupations as rapidly as possible, leaving to the next passer-by the duty of finding the body, raising the hue and cry, and sending, if he thought fit, for the police.

Hurrish smiled grimly to himself as he thought of the police. Much good *they* would do! The strong arm of the law, the first thing that a man so circumstanced in almost any other country in the world would have thought of, was the last that troubled him. He thought of his own people,—what *they* would say and think. His mind glanced to his mother, and a sudden intense disgust filled him as he thought of her satisfac-

tion; of Alley, and he caught his breath in a prayer that she, at least, might never know his share in the deed. Then he thought of Maurice, and with that thought followed a rush of grief—of grief so violent that it seemed to tear its way through the man's whole body. What *would* Morry say? What *would* he do? It was not fear for himself which prompted the thought. It was the bitterness of feeling that he had been betrayed into doing the very thing that he had sworn to Morry that for his sake he would never do, or allow, if possible, any one else to do. When he remembered the promise given only one short week before, he felt like dashing his own brains out then and there against the rocks. Not that he believed for an instant in any of those threats which the other had uttered. That Maurice, despite his own solemn declarations to that effect, would dream of denouncing him to the Government, was an idea which did not so much as cross his brain. To one of his bringing up it would, in fact, have seemed the one

impossible thing ; the thing which—no matter with what excuse, or under what provocation — no man could do without being branded as a traitor throughout the remainder of his life. It was entirely the personal point of view, the personal relations between their two selves, that made him miserable. The thought that he and Morry could never be friends again, — never, never in all their lives,—nearly drove him mad. He had no hope either that he would fail to recognise his handiwork, — nay, he would almost have preferred that he should know it. That remorse and bitter accusing self-reproach which, as regards the dead man, hardly troubled him at all, he felt acutely,—as acutely as any man so circumstanced could feel it,—as regards the dead man's brother. He would have given all that he possessed, or ever hoped to possess in the world, to bring Mat Brady back to life again,—not for his own sake, not the least from any sense of the innate sinfulness of the deed, not even from any dread of the possible consequences

to himself, but solely and wholly for the sake of his promise to Morry.

Odd thoughts, you will say, for a homicide !—for one whom the law, could it lay its hands upon him, would unhesitatingly proclaim a murderer ; but they were none the less the first that did occur to him. An anomalous state of affairs begets, no doubt, anomalous ideas, and, as far as remorse went, Hurrish's ideas were pretty much those which would have passed through the brain of any other man in his position, even where provocation had not made his act to some extent excusable—nay, even where there had been no provocation at all.

Meanwhile there was the recognised rule, and to have a prescribed rule to follow is always an immense comfort and repose to the mind. With a calmness which, to those unacquainted with so abnormal a state of affairs, would have seemed incredible, he left the body and walked leisurely down the hill, crossing the dead man's own ground as he did so. He did not even think of breaking into

pieces or otherwise destroying the stick with which the deed had been committed. He simply thrust it into the heart of a large furze bush, the first he passed, pulled his coat down, buttoned it over his shirt, which was slightly stained by his own wound, brushed off the mud and dirt which had adhered to him, felt along his neck to make sure that the wound was not of a sufficiently serious character to signify, then—without another glance at the dead man—walked away across the slope, and up the sheep-track leading towards the high-road. Then—remembering that it might be as well not to be seen there at that precise moment, particularly as he would shortly have to pass a police-barrack—he turned to the left, threading his way between a number of boulders standing on end one behind the other, crossed the base of a hill,—its name, to be topographically accurate, was Cash-laundrumlahanah,—keeping its ridged mass between him and the road. Then—still keeping away from the main route—he

struck off toward the sea, under a tall, nearly vertical sweep of cliff, and along a track which would bring him in time, he knew, to Ballyvaughan.

When within about four miles of his destination, what with the heat of the sun and his rapid walking, perhaps, too, a little with the emotions of the morning, he began to grow thirsty, so turned aside at Gleninagh to have a drink out of the famous well there. It was approached by a couple of stone steps, and covered over with an arch surmounted by a cross. Hurrish hastily climbed the steps, and taking up a vessel, left benevolently for the service of passers-by, drank long and thirstily. He was in the act, having done so, of putting the drinking-cup down again, when he suddenly perceived, with some dismay, that it was a skull; another and much older one, of which this was evidently the successor, lay a little way off on the ledge, half covered with green mould. It was not exactly a pleasant incident, especially to one whose morning's work

had been what Hurrish's had been ! It was a comfort, however, to reflect there was nothing actually unlucky about it. On the contrary, skulls were formerly, and in some places are still, considered absolutely indispensable to the proper efficaciousness of a holy well. By the time he reached Ballyvaughan, Hurrish, at any rate, had nearly forgotten the incident. The fair was drawing to an end, so there was no time to lose, and in the course of ten minutes he found himself engaged in a brisk chaffer with a gentleman from Mayo, a large grazier, who wanted to get the whole of his stock of calves at at least nine shillings a-head under what their owner considered their value,—Burren calves fetching, as every one knows, better prices than those of any other district in Ireland.

Not merely was he not alarmed, but—save when he thought of his promise to Morry—Hurrish was not even particularly disturbed by his morning's work. He had not, of course, intended to kill Mat Brady,

and in cold blood would never, under any circumstances, have done so. But this had been far from cold blood. The man had shot at him deliberately and treacherously from behind shelter, and, armed only with his trusty blackthorn, he had rushed upon him, struck down his defences, had brought the stick down—once—once only—upon his head. He had not even struck him again. That first sledge-hammer blow had done the work, and the man had fallen. To a great degree it was an accident, for who would ever have believed that a single blow, however delivered, would have struck the life out of that great powerful man-mountain? Hurrish knew nothing, it need hardly be said, about the mechanism of the human anatomy, but in blind rage, without calculation or thought at all, he had, as chance directed, brought his stick down upon the one spot in that huge mass of strength where life could have been extinguished by such a blow—as a hunter by good fortune may chance with his first bullet to reach the

one vulnerable spot in the carcass of some brute, which would otherwise have gored him to death. It had been the work of chance,—perhaps even of Providence,—and as such he accepted it modestly, without any self-glorification, beyond the habitual satisfaction he found in his own strength, but certainly without an iota of that horror, dismay, and personal remorse which would have filled the breast of a man less inured to hearing of deeds of violence. He even forgot it by moments, when the bargaining grew brisk and exciting ; and although, when the calves were all sold, and his hands for the moment unoccupied, it rushed back upon him with vivid realisation, it was less with a sense of horror than with a feeling that a new epoch of his life had been reached, an important turning-point which it behoved him to guard carefully, so that he might not be led away by this one act into sharing others where the justification might be less clear.

Before the reader resolves to be utterly

disgusted with this callousness, and to dismiss Hurrish O'Brien once and for ever as a monster of brutality, he must first kindly consent to take the circumstances of his life a little into consideration. We are all children of our environment—the good no less than the bad,—products of that particular group of habits, customs, traditions, ways of looking at things, standards of right and wrong, which chance has presented to our still growing and expanding consciousness. Hurrish's history must so far have been very imperfectly told if it has not been realised that he was well disposed and kindly above the average; pitiful, and disposed to use his strength for good rather than evil. Yet the fact that he had just been guilty, no matter with what justification, of another's death did not—nay, *could* not—present itself to his mind with any of that sharply-defined horror, that passion of self-dismay and self-reproach, that it would have awakened in the mind of many a far less kindly and, in his way,

conscientious man, who had been unused to hearing violence and bloodshed spoken of as the natural panacea for all the disagreements which may happen to arise between man and man. He would rather it had not happened,—when he thought of Morry and his promise to him,—very *much* rather. But as unfortunately it had happened, he resolved in his own mind that, as soon as ever he could with safety to himself, he would pay for masses to be said for the repose of Mat Brady's soul—feeling that he was certainly acting generously ; for had not Brady been the aggressor ? had he not come out that morning with the express purpose of killing himself ?—an intention which only the merest accident had hindered him from carrying out. Moreover, if the matter had ended the other way, and he, Hurrish, been the one to have been killed, he felt perfectly convinced that Mat Brady would never for a moment have thought of having masses offered up for the repose of *his* soul !

CHAPTER XI.

ALLEY'S PUNISHMENT.

THAT horror and self-disgust which he was incapable of feeling for the act itself would probably have been strongly — nay, passionately — aroused, could Hurrish have foreseen the circumstances under which Mat Brady's body was destined to be discovered.

Early the same day, Bridget O'Brien's turkeys had taken it into their heads, as they had often done before, to stray away in a body from the house; and about an hour after the deed had been committed, and when Mat Brady's body was beginning to get rigid and cold on its stony bed, Alley Sheehan was walking leisurely up the Gort-

nacoppin path, and approaching nearer and nearer to the fatal spot.

Poor little Alley ! She was enjoying her stroll in the warm sunshine, and thinking no harm of any one. She had driven the turkeys away from the vicinity of the stream, and they were now innocently engaged in pecking at the small white moths which rose in crowds from the trefoil growing upon the rocks, so that she felt she could safely linger a little out of reach of Bridget's eye. She picked a bunch of white mountain dryas and crimson crane's-bill, and tied them together with a withey, telling herself as she did so that they were for the children. She had so little idea that beauty was a thing admirable in itself, that she would probably have given a denial to any one who had asked her whether she took pleasure in the arrangement of these vividly contrasting colours, set off, as they were, with a big feathery handful of adiantum, growing more luxuriously in those deep-sheltered recesses than in many a carefully tended hothouse.

The day had changed since Hurrish had come up the path, and the holy calm of morning had been suddenly killed by the sound of strife. The pearly light had given way to a broad serenity, rare in that storm-driven region. Not that the sky was cloudless. A great line of snowy cumuli, united at their bases, clear in the upper portion of their summits, was drifting slowly over the open spaces of sea and collecting in white packs upon the horizon. Against this opaque whiteness the three isles of Aran stood out with unusual distinctness; the circular mass of Dun Ængus—greatest and most famous of all surviving raths—showing its grey and broken circle upon the highest point of all.

Alley had too much of the Celtic Eolian-harp temperament not to be influenced by the character of the day and scene. With her it usually took the more direct form of devotion. Her pure, singularly transparent spirit seemed to float away in visions of faith and tenderness, which her very ignorance—if you will superstition—only made the wider

and the more embracing. Certain types repeat themselves eternally at all ages of the world, and hers was the type of all those gentle ascetic natures which at every period and under all variations of circumstances have sprung up spontaneously. There had probably been Alley Sheehans here in Burren ages before this one had been born, for these stony fastnesses, with the neighbouring ones of Aran, had for centuries been the resort of the pure, the pious, the pitiful, who had succeeded in escaping from that pandemonium of carnage which year after year, and century after century, had made the rest of the island a fit habitation only for some blood-besmeared rabble of hell.

What she would have done had her lot been cast in a different communion, it is difficult even to imagine. It was the central heart of that creed—that mother who is the type of all motherhood—which drew her and kept her upwards. Her prayers, those she used on non-official occasions, were an odd medley—half self-invented, and as ele-

mentary, therefore, as the cooings of a wood-pigeon, half made up of, to her, nearly incomprehensible fragments from the slowly elaborated ritual of Christendom. She possessed a little tattered 'Key to Heaven,' which, like the rosary, had belonged to her mother, and which she took to chapel with her on Sunday. The greater part of this work was as dark to her as if it had been written in Latin or Hebrew. Here and there, however, she managed to pick off a scrap, as a building bird pulls a leaf off a tree. There was the anthem and litany to our Lady of Loretto, for instance, which, by dint of much repetition, had acquired a sort of meaning—not its own meaning, doubtless, but something that did just as well, possibly even better. Whenever Alley knelt down to pray, a bit, from long habit, seemed to spring to her lips. First, perhaps, a bit of the anthem—"Despise not thou our prayers, but deliver us from all dangers, O ever glorious and blessed Virgin!" Then the invocation, "Mother most pure, Mother

most chaste, Mother undefiled, Mother most admirable—Mary, mother, pray for us ! Seat of wisdom, Cause of our joy, Mystical Rose, Flower of David, Gate of Heaven, Morning Star, Health of the weak, Refuge of Sinners, Comforter of all the afflicted—Holy Mary mother, pray for us !”

There was something about all these grand words which gave little Alley a distinct feeling of pleasurable excitement, for, like most of her countrymen and countrywomen, she had an ear for the sonorous, and they were about the nearest thing to poetry she had ever heard. Her own mental pictures of the same gracious image were very different, however,—at once clearer and less definite. They had caught some of their traits, no doubt, from the prints and images at Tubbamina chapel, but were mixed up besides with the sun and the stars, the sea where it was calm, the flowers in the cracks of the rocks—a vague brooding image, unformed, yet real enough too to herself. Sometimes, when she had been sitting a long time

quite alone, this realisation would grow curiously, nay even startlingly vivid, so vivid that if a white form had come slowly towards her over the level rocks, and a face—the face which every painter has tried to paint—had looked down gently at her with its eyes of pity, she would have felt more awe and wonder than actual astonishment.

In trouble especially her instinct was to fly to this refuge, as a small frightened creature flies instinctively to its sheltering-place. She was very troubled now about Maurice Brady, and Hurrish's last words had brought this trouble into a sort of focus. She had never put it to herself whether she loved Maurice enough to marry him, for that was not the form which her reflection took, but she did ask herself what would become of her if she went on being so dreadfully afraid of him as she had lately been. When he had informed her that he intended to make her his wife, she had simply been pleased without thinking much about it; she had been only sixteen at the time, and young even for

that not very advanced age. That was two years ago, however, and two years had taught her a good deal. She was not given to introspection—that, happily, not being one of the vices of the class to which she belonged ; but none the less she had a feeling that it would not be well for her and Maurice to marry. She admired him, wondered at him, was proud of him, but in her heart of hearts she was aware that she shrank from his approach. Fear—even in a minor degree—is, to one of her gentle timorous nature, the worst probably of sensations, and it was one that she never could entirely get over with him. He was so authoritative, so hard, clear, decided in all his notions. That cold vein of egotism, too, which was an integral part of his nature, had made itself more clearly felt in their *tête-à-têtes* than at other times. The unknown is always invested with a mysterious terror in minds as naïve as hers, and Maurice's life, plans, objects, ambitions, and future, were all alike utterly unrealisable to

her imagination. She had a feeling that in marrying him she embarked upon a new life, one for which her previous one had by no means fitted her,—that many things might be required of her that she did not feel able to respond to, and from which she shrank back as a child shrinks from an unknown brink. She had no ambition—not even for fine clothes; she liked what she knew, and what she felt herself capable of understanding. This wild Burren—grim as it would have seemed to most people—had wound itself round her heart, as the first environment it has known does wind round a young impressionable nature, especially in one of her race. The little dells where the grass grew thick and rich; the wells full of offerings to their respective saints; the rifts into which she could plunge her hands, and bring them up filled with flowers; the isles of Aran opposite, where the saints used to live, and at which she looked in consequence with such reverence; the wild clearness of the sea, and great environing

arch of sky — Hurrish's kind face, which seemed a part of it all. If Maurice would only agree to settle in some small cabin, quite close to Hurrish's, where she could see him every day, without having to be ordered about by old Bridget, then indeed, she thought, she would be quite happy, and not one bit afraid to marry him at once !

She had reached the point where the valley opened into an amphitheatre, and the cluster of beehive oratories rose solitary in the hollow, when she all at once remembered that this part of the valley was now no longer Mick Maloney's, but Mat Brady's property. Alley's terror of Mat Brady amounted to monomania. Never could she forget the day, now more than a year ago, when, happening by ill-luck to pass close to his cabin, the great red-headed, half-tipsy Caliban had suddenly darted out of it and had pursued her over the rocks. How she had run, and how he had followed faster than she could escape, and how he had caught her, and held her fast, swearing at her for her terror, and exhaling a

portentous smell of rank whisky ! It is true that he did not actually hurt her. He was not, perhaps, even as brutal at bottom as many an English, certainly as many a French yahoo of the same mental calibre would have been ; but he frightened and sickened the fragile girl with the horror of his presence, with the sense of her own powerlessness under the grip of his hand, by his loud voice, and coarse, grinning, baboon-like face so close to her own. It was like some delicate domesticated half-humanised bird or animal in the clutch of a wild ferocious specimen of its own species, whose wrath it has evoked and knows not how to allay. She had trembled like a leaf, and had implored him with tears to release her, which he for a long time had refused to do. At last, however, her tears and terror had had their effect, or he had not known what else to do, for, with a laugh of brutal triumph, he had flung her away so violently as almost to throw her down. Now, as she remembered that dreadful day and her own sensations, she glanced nervously round,

fearing to see the uncouth figure of the detested Brady. No, thank God, there was no one in sight, and she breathed more easily. Poor little gentle Alley!

Her glance was passing away, and in another moment would have reverted to the flowers. But what—what was that on the ground?—huddled together like a heap of seaweed? At first it seemed to her to be merely a bundle of clothes,—some man had left his coat there, probably, while he was at work. It was too large, however, for that, she perceived on a second glance. There was a boot, too—why should a man leave his boots behind him? The boot was so twisted and shapeless that it did not occur to her at first that there could be a foot in it. Still, she found herself looking at it with growing feelings of bewilderment and suspicion—that vague sense of something amiss which often precedes the actual certainty.

All at once her blood seemed to stand still, her heart to send great thuds upward to her throat; her knees knocked, her breath

failed, and she almost fell to the ground with horror. It was only a *hand* she saw,—a large lividly white hand sticking out of the side of the bundle of clothes,—a hand flung, back downwards, upon the ground, the fingers hanging loose and half hidden in the grass and daisies. Poor Alley's very soul seemed to cleave together and die away with horror at the sight, the innocent grey rock and grasses to turn black and yawn suddenly under her feet, as if an earthquake had passed over Gortnacoppin. With the unwilling fascination of horror she looked and looked again at the horrible object, and now she could see a face—a grey distorted face—which seemed to be gazing up at her with its dull dead eyes. The lower part of this face was hidden by the shoulder against which it had fallen, but the eyes were wide open, and over them hung a mass of red hair—hair surely familiar to her? More than this Alley did not stay to see. The cup of horror was already full and brimming over; to escape was her only thought.

With a shriek—the shriek of a creature in extremest terror—she tore madly down the valley in the direction of the cabin. To get within reach of some other living human being, to escape from the dreadful sight of those dead eyes, was her only desire. It seemed to her terrified imagination as if that formless, hideous thing that had been a man, had risen too from where it had lain, and was following her—nay, was gaining step by step upon her. On and on she ran, and always as she ran, there, close behind, she felt it still, always in the same attitude as before, yet somehow moving faster than she could, and gaining rapidly upon her. Every moment she fancied she might feel its touch upon her shoulder, might see that face peering into her eyes, those livid hands clutching hers, those twisted limbs in contact with her own. She flung out shriek after shriek of horror into the silent air, startling the larks as they circled in melodious rhythmic curves over her head. On and on down the silent lifeless valley, over the innumerable rifts and

fissures, scrambling across the boulders, her feet hurt and bleeding from the stones—still on, on, on she ran.

How she reached the cabin, how she got the door open, she never precisely knew. Half crazy with terror she rushed into the house and up to Bridget, whom under ordinary circumstances she was too much afraid of even to approach, caught at her dress and flung herself, like a criminal escaping from justice, at her feet, hiding her face in the folds of her red flannel petticoat.

The old woman's astonishment at first literally deprived her of the power of speech and movement. The next it turned to anger.

“Quit yer holt this minite, ye cutty! How dar you be clutchin’ at me like that? Is it shleep-walkin’ ye are, ye flag-hopper? Quit yer holt, or begorra I’ll lay yer flat wid me pokar, so I will!”

But these angry words, which usually she would have shrunk from, had no effect at all upon the girl's mortal terror. She

would rather have been beaten, rather have been killed by a living and breathing woman, than be left alone to that dread which was clutching at her very soul, and paralysing the vital actions of her whole body.

Twice she opened her mouth to speak, and each time her parched tongue refused utterance. At last she got the words out.

“Thar’s a man—kilt—dead!” she stammered.

Bridget’s face changed. A gleam of wild satisfaction came into her eyes. She caught the girl in her turn by the arm, and peered curiously into her face.

“A man kilt? What sort of a man is it, acushla? Till me quick, gurl!” she said eagerly.

Then, as Alley’s paralysed tongue remained dumb—“Is it Mat Brady? Whist, chilt, don’t be dashed; sure what is there to scar ye? A man kilt!—trath, an’ if that’s all ’tis scared enough an’ more nor enough you’ll be before you’re much older, glory be to God!”

They went back together to the field. Great as Alley's terror was of the place, she was more afraid still of remaining behind. Who could tell whether the thing might not leap on her from behind the door, or fall headlong down the chimney, and lie there, staring up at her with those horrible livid eyes which would never, never close again.

No one had been in the field since she left. The turkeys were still pecking at the moths, which rose out of the clefts of the rock. The bunch of ferns and flowers still lay precisely where she had thrown it down in her frenzied flight; the grey overhanging rocks were gay with sedums and crowsbill; the larks were circling overhead, pouring down a rippling volume of clear star-like notes. Spring, even in the Burren, was revelling in a thousand dainty fancies. And there before them on the ground, amidst all this free, pure, beautiful upspringing nature, lay, horribly twisted and deformed, that miserable heap of clay which that morning had been a man.

Bridget walked straight up to the corpse, and stood looking down at it, wild gleams of triumph irradiating her witch-like face and black gleaming eyes.

“ ’Tis there ye’re, are ye ? ” she muttered jeeringly. “ Shtill an’ cauld, an’ qui’t enough *now*, Mat Brady ! D’ye know who’s standin’ over yer ? D’ye know that Hurrish O’Brien’s mother’s lukin’ down at ye ? Ach, an’ ’tis th’ ugly corpse ye make ! I wudn’t have the layin’ out of yer for saxpence, so I wouldn’t, ye baste ! A gun ! ” she muttered, looking down at the weapon, which still lay where it had been thrown upon the ground. “ But ’twas na gun dun *that* ”—looking at the corpse and the dark brown mark of the wound on the temple,—“ na, na, na gun, but a shtick. An’ a good man, too, ’twas hild that shtick, so ’twas. Hurrish ? Na, na, ’twasn’t Hurrish. Hurrish is too saft. Hurrish ’ud do most anythink rayther nor he’d kill a man. Maybe ’t’ul be ’bout,” she went on muttering to herself, as she peered eagerly around amongst

the stunted hawthorns and low bushes of furze, which sprouted out of the clefts of the rocks.

Suddenly she gave a scream and a pounce, pulled a stick out of the tuft of furze, waved it frantically in the air, then, with the shriek of a maniac, fell plump down upon her knees on the ground.

“*'Twas ! 'twas ! 'twas himsel'* dun it !—himsel' alone an' no other ! Glory be to God and the saints this day ! Me shame's wiped out ! Hurrish, darlint, yer old mither's shame's wiped out ! 'Tis crying for joy she is this minute ! Oh, me darlint son ! me boy ! An' I that thought he was too chicken-hearted for to kill a man ! I wronged you, Hurrish darlint ! Core of my soul ! where is he, that I may bliss him ? Where is he at all, that I may get at him an' bliss him for this day's work ? Hurrish ! Hurrish, alannah !”

She had quite forgotten Alley in her excitement. Her withered face was alive with hate and love ; her eyes blazed like live coals in the wrinkled setting. The girl, however,

had understood, and her cheeks turned from white to red : for the second time that day she clutched her old tyrant by the arm, almost shaking her in her anger.

“How *dar*’ you say ’twas Hurrish dun it?” she exclaimed. “Hurrish wudn’t ha’ touched him ! How *dar*’ you say Hurrish killed him ? Yer a wicked woman, so ye ar’,—a bad wicked woman ! an’ I’ll tell Hurrish meself on yer, so I will. *You* might ha’ dun it, but Hurrish woudn’t,—he woudn’t hurt a fly. For shame to ye sayin’ sich a thing ! An’ if I were strang enough, I’d bate ye for it, so I wud !”

It was a vulture flown at by a ring-dove ! For a moment the old woman was petrified and almost cowed with astonishment. The next she sprang up, seized the girl by the shoulder, and shook her as if she meant literally to shake her to death, then brandished the stick violently before her eyes.

“D’ye see that, ye little fool ? D’ye see that, ye imperent cutty ? An’ iv ’twasn’t for Hurrish hisself, I’d lay ye cold thar too

for yer imperence — be my soul ! yis. To dar till me I didn't know me own son's shtick. Luk at that, an' say agen 'twasn't Hurrish dun it—God presarve him for it this day an' ivermore, Amen ! An' if ye dar say word to livin' soul, 'twill be the last ye spake on this arth, so mind that ! 'Tis cauld and shtiff loike that ye'll be, ye insilint cutty ! Staaln' into other folk's houses, aitin' their mate an' drink, and takin' away their good names !”

But Alley hardly heard the end of this exhortation. The sight of Hurrish's stick—that familiar stick, which little Katty had played with so innocently only that very morning—overcame her as no words could have done. Horror struck home to her ; horror, and a sickening paralysing chill, which seemed to petrify her whole body. This time she uttered no cry, only a low gasping sob, and turning, ran back the way she had come, leaving the old woman alone with the dead man.

When she got near the cabin she paused

abruptly. There was no home for her there,—no home ever again anywhere in all this weary world. Hurrish had done this thing—kind Hurrish, whom she loved so much. *He* had done it; had beaten this man to death—perhaps when he was drunk—murdered him, and left him there, dead or dying, upon the rocks. The horror of it was too great, too impossible, for her to contain. She threw her shawl over her head and ran wildly on, heedless of where she was going,—ran, ran, ran, as a creature runs after it has received its death-blow.

CHAPTER XII.

“HOW CUD HE BE THERE, AN’ HE DEAD?”

It seemed indeed to Alley as if the end of the world had come. Father Peter had been preaching about it only a few Sundays before, saying it was near, and now, perhaps, it had arrived. To a loving heart sudden loss of faith in a being that it has loved is a catastrophe which needs no external one, no loud sounding crack of doom, to make more terrible. The idea crossed her mind of running off to Galway to the convent where her sister was, and asking to be taken in there. She was afraid, however. She would have to go to Ballyvaughan, and there take the steamer across the bay—a journey more fraught with terror

to her untravelled imagination than any pilgrimage to Rome or Jerusalem to one of another bringing up. She simply ran and ran and ran, heedless of where she was going, till she found herself upon the shore, at the top of the rocks, which were here not of any great height. She did not even pause here, but clambering down, heedless of the sharp pointed peaks, studded at their lower part with acorn barnacles, hid herself in a sort of cleft or shallow cave just within reach of high-water mark. If she could only stay there for ever, she thought, wildly—remain there till she died—never see old Bridget again—better still, never see Hurrish—never see any one belonging to her old life ! She did not think of Maurice Brady at all. She was too confused and miserable. Had she done so, however, it would only have been an added pang, for was not the man that had been killed Maurice's brother ?

The cave was narrow and tapering, covered with an immense, nearly horizontal, block,

which spanned it like the capstone of a cromlech. It was nearly quite shut in at the back, but at one point a little ray of light threaded its way through the rocks, throwing a pale yellowish illumination upon the floor below. To poor Alley this yellow light seemed like an eye peeping in at her, and she cowed down anew to avoid its gaze.

The tide was low, but had turned, and was creeping steadily up, its voice rising from time to time in a long choking sob. Every now and then, too, over the furrowed expanse of rock, a tall single shooting column of white spray would rise, towering like some great tropical blossom—an aloe or agave—into existence, and then dying suddenly down again immediately.

The sob of the waves, the hollow chuckling noises, the great white shining expanse of sea—all so familiar that no thought of alarm had ever mingled with them before—filled poor Alley to-day with unaccountable terror. The thud underneath, caught by an

echo, sounded like blows struck upon the roof of the slab under which she was crouching. She thought it must be some one moving above there, and shivered and crouched yet more closely down, heedless of the masses of dripping seaweeds and slimy red sponges which spouted at her out of a hundred gaping orifices. It was all strange, all new, all terrible to-day, as the most familiar scenes become when seen for the first time under the light of some blighting calamity. Terror was in her very soul—terror of everything and of everybody. What point had she to turn to? where could she look for help? Even God, the saints,—the blessed Virgin herself,—seemed to have changed their aspect. Hurrish—the one earthly being to whom she had hitherto clung—kind Hurrish, good Hurrish, who had taken her to live with him, who had been father and brother both to her,—Hurrish—impossible yet hideous realisation—Hurrish had done this. Hurrish was a murderer! She pressed her

hands tightly over her ears, as if the very air was full of the horrible sound.

She had remained there crouched among the rocks for nearly an hour, stunned and hardly conscious of the lapse of time, when she heard the sound of some one approaching. Several times before she had fancied she had heard steps, but it had turned out to be only her own imagination. This time, however, it really was some one coming along the strip of shingle which lay between her and the sea. First a shadow upon the rock before her—the shadow of an elongated hat; then a larger and vaguer mass; then a crunching noise sounding above the hollow roar of the sea, and a figure in a suit of brown tweed appeared in sight.

Alley, who had shrunk back into the cave expecting to see a stranger, gave a faint involuntary cry at sight of this figure, which caused it to stop and look up, and their eyes met. It was Maurice Brady.

He too stared open-eyed with astonishment. Of all places it would never have

occurred to him to meet Alley here, upon these lonely rocks, so far from home.

“Alley!” he exclaimed, wonderingly. “Why, Alley, whatever brings you here? Is anything gone wrong? You look scared somehow and white. Has that old beast Bridget been beating you again? I wonder that you’d stop with such an old scawlcrow. I wouldn’t, if ’twas me!”

But Alley, instead of answering, only stood still staring at him, white and stiffened with terror, like a little statue of Fear, at the mouth of the cave. Her hair had fallen loose, and hung in a dishevelled mass upon her shoulders; her poor little naked feet, cut with the stones she had run so wildly over, were stained here and there with thin trickles of blood; her whole attitude was expressive of only one thing—terror—as she fixed her great eyes upon the young man without speaking.

“What brought ye ’tall?” she stammered at last.

Maurice gave a little laugh, rather an em-

barrassed one. “Well, now, ’twas a mighty queer thing that brought me, and that’s the truth, Alley. The queerest thing ever happened to me yet, so it was!”

He waited, expecting her to express surprise or interest, but Alley said nothing. She simply stood and looked at him, all her remaining consciousness bound up in the resolution not to tell, not to tell, not to tell. That was her only thought.

“Sit down upon this bit of rock, and don’t look so silly and scared: you make me feel quite queer, so you do,” the young man went on, indicating a recess where she was to seat herself.

Alley obeyed. She was in such a state of mental and physical collapse that she would have yielded to any suggestion. She sat mechanically down upon the piece of rock in front of the cave, and Maurice seated himself beside her.

“Now, mind, Alley, before I tell you anything, you must give me your word not to repeat a word to any one,” he began, au-

thoritatively. "I don't know what mightn't happen if you did. They might put it into the papers, perhaps, with my name and all! Troth, if they did, I'd run away, and never come back at all, but go and settle maybe in America."

He waited to allow this dreadful picture of his own probable expatriation to sink into Alley's mind before proceeding any further. As she said nothing, however, but simply stared blankly at the sea, he concluded that she was still thinking about whatever it was that had upset her, and that he had better tell his story first, and exact a promise about keeping it a secret afterwards.

"The curious thing is that it should have been *me* that it happened to, for if there's one thing I've always set my face against, it's the rubbish fellars go on with about ghosts, and fetches, and suchlike old-fashioned talk. Now, if it had been a fellar like Hurrish seen what I saw this morning, he'd have been screaming ghosts and goblins all over the country!"

In spite of this assertion, a physiognomist would have perceived that the young man was not quite so calm as he would have appeared. Instead of its usual self-sustained air, his face wore rather an unsettled and excited expression, and he glanced from time to time over his shoulder, with a slight air of suspiciousness.

Alley, however, noticed nothing. Her mind was enveloped in a mist—a mist that obscured all lesser objects—sometimes closing up entirely, sometimes opening a little way to reveal hideous visions, but never entirely disappearing.

“Well, Alley, mind now what I say about not a word of this to any one. I’d some writing to do this morning, so I got up early—not having to be at the shop till nine—and went down to the sea, thinking I’d do it better upon the shore, for the room I have is small, and there’s another young fellar in it besides myself. Well, I got a nice comfortable place, much as it might be here, only instead of rocks it’s all sand

there, stretching along the sea for miles. I was busy with my writing, for when a man writes for the newspapers he has to be very particular, and I happened to look up for a moment, thinking of a word I couldn't remember. There was a sort of a gap in front of me, something like Gortnacoppin, only smaller, and, in the middle of the gap—are you minding what I'm saying, Alley?—in the middle of the gap who should be standing there but Mat, looking as usual, only a bit queer, as if he'd been drinking, and his eyes wide open, and a black mark on his head, just there, to the left of—I say, don't be clutching at me like that, Alley; sure I'm not going to run away—listen now! I jumped up, and 'Well, Mat, what are ye doing here?' says I, and went over towards him; but when I come to the place the devil a sign of him was in it at all. So I thought maybe he'd dodged behind one of the hillocks, not wanting me to know he was there, and I went round, but no, not a

sign of him there either; so I climbed up another big hillock there was, where I could see all round me and into the hollows, but not a sign of any one 'cept some sheep, and a little boy minding them; so I run up to him, and asked, did he see a man pass? and he said, No, ne'er a one had passed 'tall that mornin', only myself — and he between me and the road, you mind! So when I heard that, I gathered up my papers like a shot, and back with me to the shop, and made them give me leave for the day, and off I come to see what took Mat there, or if it was himself at all. For it's the queerest thing ever I knew, and somehow I can't get it out of my head."

Poor Alley! Before one terror had begun to subside another had sprung up and taken its place! Her attention, which at first had wandered, had gradually grown more and more concentrated upon the narrative, and long before it had ended she was trembling from head to foot. Her previous expression of blank despair had changed for one of active

absorbing terror. Her teeth chattered ; her eyes were set like the eyes of a sleep-walker.

“My God, how cud he be there, an’ he dead ?” fell almost unconsciously from her quivering lips.

Maurice Brady started and stared—started and stared again. He had told her his story chiefly from an impelling desire to tell it to some one, no matter who—to get the thing, as it were, outside himself—certainly not with any idea that she could throw light upon the mystery. At this startling corroboration, however, panic seized him. Could it mean—could there be anything *in* it ? Was it, could it be meant as a warning ? Fear shot suddenly through his blood, like a stream of icy water. Alley’s pallor, which he had been too self-absorbed at first to notice much, rushed back vividly upon his mind. *Did* she know something ? *Had* she seen anything ? If so—

“What’s that yer saying ’tall, Alley ?” he exclaimed, springing to his feet and speaking in a tone of authority. What d’ye mean

by Mat being dead? How should he be dead, when he was as alive as meself three days ago? Speak up 'tonce if yer don't want me to think that ye're raving out and out," he added, stooping and seizing her by the shoulder, as if to arouse her.

Poor Alley turned her large terrified eyes upon him. What had she done? What had she said?

"Oh, Morry dear, don't mind me! Sure 'tis distraight I am, I dun know what I'm sayin' 'tall!" she cried, clasping her hands piteously.

But Maurice's suspicions were too thoroughly aroused to be allayed now.

"You *must* have meant something, Alley!" he answered violently. "Has anything happened? Speak up—d'ye hear me?" he added, giving a slight shake to the shoulder which he still held. "Do what I tell you this instant: arn't I going to be yer husband? Do ye dar disobey me? If ye don't tell me, begorra I'll take yer back to Hurrish, and see what *he* has to say. If I don't have it out

of you, I'll have it out of him. And, by God ! if I find——”

But poor little Alley had reached the point where endurance could go no further. The concentrated anguish of the last two hours, and now Maurice's sudden unkindness, were too much for her. She fell back half fainting upon the rock, and lay there white as a little ghost.

The young man's anger was too vehement, however, for him to experience any sudden revulsion towards tenderness. He was fond of her, in his way, very fond ; nevertheless his feelings at that moment were less those of pity than of anger at her inconvenient feebleness—anger at being balked in his desire to plunge into the heart of his mystery, which was fast driving him mad with anger and excitement. He was not particularly tender by nature, and his love, strong as it was, was for the moment too entirely in abeyance to anger for him to care very much whether Alley suffered or not. His strongest desire now was to get away. What was the use of staying

with a girl who only cried and fainted? If anything really had happened, the only way to satisfy himself was to go and see. As soon, therefore, as he saw that she was beginning to revive, and that a faint colour was returning to her cheeks, he left her where she was, saying that he would be back soon, and started as fast as he could across the level platforms of rock, past Hurrish's cabin, and up the hill in the direction of his brother's cabin, which took him, as a matter of course, straight through the Gortnacoppin valley.

By the time he reached the rocky amphitheatre which had been the scene of that morning's tragedy, it was no longer deserted. A small crowd, chiefly of ragged boys and girls with a few women, had gathered upon the ridge, and were peering down curiously at the dead man. Two policemen, armed with their guns, stood posted as sentinels on either side of the body; a party of four more, in front of whom walked Mr Sub-inspector Higgins, were coming down the path, their black

official figures sharply defined against the pale-grey luminous background.

Until that moment Maurice had hardly known what he feared. Now he stood still, appalled by the sight before him—appalled by the sudden realisation of his worst fears. That that dark heap beside which the policemen stood was his brother Mat's body, he had not an atom of doubt. He put up his hands to his head, and staggered back against a rock, white, and sickened with horror.

His mind was not idle, however. Alley had known of this! That point was beyond a doubt. If she had known about it, who then could have committed the crime but Hurrish?—Hurrish, who had sworn so lately that for his sake nothing would ever tempt him to lay a finger upon Mat—Hurrish, who pretended to be so devoted to him! The certainty seemed to burn itself into his very brain. All the particles of evidence rose up one by one before him, and each seemed to strengthen and confirm that belief.

Who would Alley be so anxious to screen as Hurrish? Who so likely to meet Mat here at the juncture of the two farms? Clearly Hurrish. Hurrish had done it; everything pointed to it. All at once the desire for revenge—hot, insatiable, all-devouring—rose and rose in his breast, until everything else became submerged under its torrent. Had he not sworn—sworn to Hurrish himself—that if any one laid a finger upon Mat, he should pay for it. And now—by God! if justice was to be had, he *should* pay for it!

The second party of policemen had by this time made their way down the hill, and had joined the group below. He could hear the inspector's clear-cut voice issuing orders to his men. Suddenly he started forward, and hurried down the slope, pushing through the crowd—an inquisitive and excited rather than overawed one—until he, too, stood beside the corpse, which still lay upon its back, just as it had fallen when the

breath of life had left it. His first impulse was to put his hand above his brother's heart; the next to try and lift his hand. It was already cold, and as stiff as if carved in wood.

The inspector was beginning to put the usual inquiries—who had last seen the man alive? had any sound of the struggle been heard? Suddenly Maurice started to his feet with an impetuous gesture.

“Don't be wasting your time asking no questions!” he exclaimed imperiously. “Go down to that house there and arrest the man what's done it, that's what you've got to do. This is my brother, Matthew Brady, lying here murdered, and the man that's murdered him is—Hurrish O'Brien!”

There was a start, a sudden “sensation” amongst all present. Even the policemen—most of whom had been a long time in the district—were taken by surprise, for there was no better known, or on the whole better liked, name than Hurrish's.

Mr Higgins alone was impassive. To him all these strange names sounded precisely alike.

“Who do you say?—Hurrish—H-u-r—— How do you spell it?” he inquired, taking a note-book out of his pocket and beginning to enter the name in it with a stylographic pen.

Maurice disdaining to answer, the necessary information was supplied by one of the policemen, who at the same time whispered something into his superior’s ear.

“Yes, yes; of course. What are your reasons for believing this man to be the criminal?” he inquired, turning sharply to Maurice: Mr Higgins never hesitated on duty.

A whirl of conflicting ideas rushed through the young man’s brain at the question. If possible he would screen Alley, he hastily resolved. Her name should not be dragged into it if he could help it.

“I’ve reasons enough, and more than enough,” he said, sullenly. “’Tis he that’s

done it. There's no more doubt about it than that the sun's in the sky. Every one knows that he and my brother are enemies—have been these years past."

Mr Higgins was rather perplexed. Over-readiness to proclaim the name of the guilty man had not hitherto formed part of his experiences of agrarian outrages! He was a zealous officer, however,—one, too, to whom opportunities for distinguishing himself had hitherto been rather wanting,—and he was not disposed therefore to allow the present occasion to slip from his grasp. Unfortunately there was a hitch. The local resident magistrate, to whom under ordinary circumstances application would have been made for a warrant of arrest, happened to be away, having been summoned to attend a trial in Limerick, and in his absence the nearest unpaid magistrate was Mr O'Brien of Donore. Now Mr Higgins would have given a good deal not to have been obliged to present himself before that gentleman so

soon after that last parting of theirs, the memory of which still rankled unpleasantly. Duty, however, was duty, and he was not the man to allow personal considerations to stand in the way of it. Desiring the policemen in attendance to remain where they were, and on no account to allow any one to approach the body until he returned, he accordingly reascended the side of the glen, followed only by a single policeman, and regained the road where he had left his horse.

Arrived at the top of the pass, he turned by a natural instinct to look back at the scene which he had just quitted. The sides of the valley were so steep that the groups below seemed to be almost vertically underneath. Fresh figures were descending the rocks on the other side,—three men and two women, the madder-red petticoats of the latter forming bright moving spots of colour upon the wilderness of grey. Below stood the policemen, conspicuous by their black-

ness, gathered together in a compact formal-looking group. And, erect beside the dead man, his arms crossed upon his chest, his pale handsome face set like a mask, stood Maurice Brady — an image of vengeance waiting for its victim.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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